

Daniel - Selected - Key Election Issues

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Amen. Thank you all. What a great reminder. This morning we're stepping away from our study of Luke for a week. You may have heard that there's an election coming up.

So we're going to take a little break. You may also know that we as Presbyterians never miss an opportunity to talk about election. Thank you.

I told James I had a preacher joke at the beginning and I needed his help. In all seriousness, you don't hear a lot of explicitly political sermons here.

Because we focus on declaring the truth of God's Word, the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And in fact, this sermon, while titled Key Election Issues, will likely disappoint you if you were hoping for specific advice for Tuesday, as I've been asked for this morning on multiple occasions.

[1 : 19] But it is true that we as God's people should care about things like politics and elections. As we just read earlier in Jeremiah, God calls us to seek the good and pray for the places we live.

Our calling as followers of Jesus is to seek that His kingdom would come here on earth. This kingdom of justice and mercy and truth. That it would be more and more here on earth.

And that involves laws and leaders and systems and societies. All of those things. God's Word has much to say about such matters. God's Word has much to say about such matters.

God's Word cares about elections.

God's Word is unspiritual or worldly, beneath us, unimportant. But what I really want to address this morning from God's Word is what I call key election issues.

[3 : 11] But I mean the ones I've seen in an unhealthy way in my own heart. It's a confession really and part of that confession that I didn't plan for that I've realized this morning is I confess how much I care about what you think about what I'm about to say.

I just say while I'm confessing I'll just start with that one. I feel like I'm going to disappoint everybody at the same time and that's not a real great feeling. But those feelings and many others have been in my heart over the last few months.

I've seen my emotions ride the waves of the news cycle. I've been discouraged, hopeful, disgusted, anxious, and many things in between.

And sometimes I would say those emotions have been very appropriate emotions. But I've let my outlook on life be driven by the latest poll numbers, various conspiracy theories, even the relative hopes of third party candidates I've never heard of before.

All sorts of things that have controlled me. Maybe this hasn't been the case for you with this election cycle. Maybe you have had your heart controlled by other things.

[4 : 31] Recent test results, maybe. Tumultuous relationships. The loss of a job. And you feel these circumstances in your life that they begin to control and drive your heart and your outlook on everything.

They seem to be writing your story for you and telling you how you should approach life. I believe many of us have felt it acutely with the election though. And one of the things God used this year to keep me anchored in the midst of the storms in my heart was the book of Daniel as we studied it this summer.

You missed the lion, didn't you? It's been a little while. Yeah, one last visit from the lion on the slide. But it helped me because Daniel lived in a culture much like ours.

He learned what it looked like to follow the true king there. To have a singular devotion to God in the midst of a pluralistic culture. And so that was really helpful to me.

Unfortunately for us, Babylon was not a democracy. So we don't get to see Daniel vote, do we? No help there. But this morning, I think there are several lessons we can revisit from the book of Daniel to help our hearts.

[5 : 52] It's not so much as we look back to Daniel, lessons for inside the voting booth. But much more so for inside our hearts. Not so much how to vote, but how to hope that I want us to consider.

Let's pray and then we will look together at God's word. Pray with me. Father, you know better than we do the struggles of our hearts.

We probably haven't plumbed the depths of what's driving us. You see all the ugliness and sin that's mixed in there. And God, you love us.

Even in the midst of that. And your word speaks to our struggles. We're so thankful for that. So would you speak to us clearly this morning.

That we might be your people. For your glory. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. If you weren't here with us for our study of the book of Daniel.

[6 : 57] Or if you don't happen to remember every word of every sermon. As we went through there. The first half of the book is a book of stories about God's people living in exile.

They've been taken into the land of Babylon. And so you get stories. Many of which you'll be familiar with. Like Daniel in the lion's den. The fiery furnace. The handwriting on the wall and the like.

Many stories like that. And along the way. And especially in the second half of the book of Daniel. God sends visions of heaven.

These eternal realities that he sometimes gives directly to Daniel. Sometimes he sends them in dreams or visions to a king. And Daniel interprets them. But what God's doing.

What's happening in Daniel. Is that he's showing his people. How vital it is for them. To remember these eternal realities. If they're going to be able to live as his people. In a foreign land.

[7 : 55] They're going to have to remember what's really true. What's eternally important. And so it enables us. To engage as we are called to.

In this world. As ambassadors of heaven. Not of a particular nation. Or a particular party. But of heaven. That we need.

An eternal perspective. On the issues that we face today. So we're going to look at a couple of them. They sound like election issues. But they're a little different. The first issue is the issue of power.

And when we're talking about power. The book of Daniel highlights. Our eternal king. As the one true king. In control of all others. It's like we've been talking about.

Already this morning. About God reigning. If there's a refrain in the book of Daniel. It's this. It happens over and over. In different people's words. Daniel chapter 4 verse 3. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.

[8 : 55] And his dominion endures. From generation to generation. The end of that chapter. His dominion is an everlasting dominion. And his kingdom endures. From generation to generation.

The end of the story of Daniel. In the lion's den. The king proclaims. He is the living God. Enduring forever. His kingdom shall never be destroyed. And his dominion shall be to the end.

He delivers and rescues. He works signs and wonders. In heaven and on earth. Then the vision of heaven. In Daniel 7. To him was given dominion.

And glory. And a kingdom. That all peoples. Nations and languages. Should serve him. This is Jesus. The son of man. His dominion. Is an everlasting dominion.

Which shall not pass away. And his kingdom one. That shall not be destroyed. You hear it over. And over and over. These are just a few examples. That Daniel's constantly being reminded.

[9 : 53] Of the everlasting kingdom. And we know that's true. Right? We've talked about it. We've rejoiced. And sung about it this morning. That God reigns forever. And ever. And over all other kings.

Kings. But have we stopped to contemplate. What it means. That the God of heaven. The ancient of days. Who loves and cares for his people.

Will remain on the throne. Well beyond Tuesday's election. Has that started to matter to us? That the authority of the most powerful leader in the world.

Pales in comparison to. And ultimately comes from. The king of kings. Kings. And that will never change. So I can trust him.

I can trust his promises. I can trust his plans for the world around me. Because he's on the throne. But the issue of power.

[10:49] Is more than merely acknowledging. God is and always will be in charge. As vital as that is. It's a good reminder for us. It's one you probably expected to hear this morning.

You needed to hear it. We all did. But it's even more than that. When we're thinking about power. And what that reality means for us. It's a matter for my heart.

Of understanding how God works. What his power looks like. As it impacts this world. Because here's what goes on in my heart. I grew up as one who thought.

That what God needed. For his power to go forth. For his kingdom to advance in the world. Was he needed Christians in the White House. And Christian stars on TV. And Christian athletes who would win all the championships.

So that they could get there and publicly. In a very influential and powerful way. Say all glory to God. Or this is only because of Jesus. Or whatever else they might say.

[11:48] God bless America. That's what needed to happen. And if those things could just happen. And if everybody could just get influential. And strong and powerful enough. The kingdom of God would go forward.

And that still is in my heart a lot. What a warped sense of power that is. That I think God's limited by our resources. Our plans.

Our capabilities. Our successes. That we must be strong and impressive and influential. To advance his kingdom. The story of the book of Daniel is exactly the opposite.

It's about a God who advances his kingdom. Through apparent weakness and defeat.

Nebuchadnezzar is the one who appears mighty and strong.

And influential. He's the king of Babylon for a while. Right? And he appears to have the world at his fingertips. He's got the upper hand. He's got greater power than Yahweh it looks like.

[12:49] He's exerting greater influence in the world. He's got the votes. The positions of power. The military might. And yet God is controlling the king's every move.

And no one has unseated the ancient of days from his throne. God assures Daniel. He remains on the throne long after Nebuchadnezzar is gone.

And king after king passes through the book of Daniel. In chapter 2 there's this great scene where Daniel and the rest of Nebuchadnezzar's wise men are sentenced to be killed because they can't interpret the king's dream.

And so the powerful captain of the king's guard himself shows up at the home of this measly exile to execute him. And Daniel facing execution does not actually start a public relations strategy.

He doesn't devise a plan of escape. Rather do you remember what he does? Daniel calls a prayer meeting. He invites his three friends together and four guys facing execution decide just to pray.

[13:59] Not maybe a power play on their part to those who were watching. He and his three friends seek mercy from the God of heaven and God answers them with the meaning of the dream and saves their life.

Here's what Daniel says in chapter 2 at verse 20. Blessed be the name of God forever and ever to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons.

He removes kings and sets up kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. There was no king Daniel needed to be afraid of.

He prayed to the king who put that king in power. Remember that's what Daniel had to remember. That's what drove him to prayer. A pretty weak position seemingly for Daniel to be in.

But he appeals to the throne of the almighty God. Listen I know you know God's in charge of everything. But do you pray like it?

[15:00] Is that where it drives you when you remember that God's in charge of everything? Do you have as much hope for the impact of your prayer on Wednesday morning as you do for your vote on Tuesday afternoon?

And not just because you don't vote in a swing state. Because you appeal to the king of kings when you pray. Where are our hearts looking for strength?

What will the progress of God's kingdom look like when we see it coming? Well often God is moving things forward through weakness and apparent defeat.

Through the small and seemingly insignificant. One of my favorite images from the book of Daniel after we went through the whole thing. Is from the dream that Daniel interprets in chapter 2.

You may remember it of a rock cut with no human hand. That crushes the outwardly great kingdoms of the world.

[16:00] God's teaching Daniel about true power. And here's what he says about this small stone. The iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, the gold. All these great kingdoms were broken in pieces.

And became like the shaft of the summer threshing floors. And the wind carried them away. So not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain.

And filled the whole earth. Verse 44. In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed. Nor shall the kingdom be left to another people.

It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end. And it shall stand forever.

Remember the stone, the small stone, Jesus, comes in an unimpressive manner.

Suffers apparent defeat on the cross. But reveals the true power of God. And in so doing establishes a kingdom that fills the whole earth.

[17:05] You ever tried balancing on a stone? Not easy, huh? What about balancing on a rock the size of the entire earth?

Could you stand on that? That's a firm foundation, isn't it? That's a safe place for us to be when we're knocked out of sorts. When we don't know where to trust.

In our weakest moments. We have a God to whom we must call out. Because He's the eternal King. Fixed in power. On His throne. Forever. A church that despairs due to the results of an election.

Or a church that declares ultimate victory due to the results of an election. Would be a church that has ceased to depend on her sovereign King.

And to follow His pattern for cultural impact. A church that remains hopeful and dependent.

Regardless of the outcome of an election.

[18:10] Testifies to the world. To the power of the small stone. And the active eternal reign of the King of Heaven. That's what God calls us to.

My fearful, prayerless heart needs to remember the nature of true power. And that underlying eternal reality of the true King is really at the heart of the book of Daniel.

Who's ruling? Who's in charge? Who's the true King? And it's really at the heart of the story of all of Scripture. And it drives these other two issues I want to mention briefly this morning.

The second issue is the issue of value. What's truly valuable? What do I treasure? What I've seen in my heart is anxiety.

Because as a Christian I want to be comfortable. And to fit in. I want life to be easy and to go well. And I want to feel like I'm right where I should be.

[19:16] What I've read in blog after blog by Christian leaders who seem to agree we must make the right decision in this election. For the sake of the future of the church in America.

And who of course disagree on what that right decision is. What I've heard in time after time of reading them is fear of the church being marginalized.

Because of an election. Of course a president who loves God. Who reflects his character. Who honors his people would be wonderful.

But if the true king is on the throne of heaven. Who the president of any country is. And what impact it has on my life.

Can't be of ultimate value can it? No person in any position can do anything or be anything that would be the thing of ultimate worth.

[20:14] Daniel reminds us over and over that we have an eternal heavenly homeland. We are in exile on earth as Daniel was in Babylon.

And so we are strangers. Who have and must maintain a distinctive identity. Who can't fit in and be comfortable with everything in our culture.

Any more than Daniel could fit in and be comfortable with every part of the king's plan to assimilate him into Babylonian culture. You remember what Daniel and his friends did at the beginning of the book, right?

They resolved not to defile themselves with the king's food. They had lots of choices of where they might not go along. How they might possibly be different.

But they make an uncomfortable political decision. That didn't help them fit in and get along. It was driven by their distinctive identity as followers of Yahweh.

[21:17] In fact, God repeatedly tells Daniel that the future of his people, the people of God on earth, involves not only sticking out as distinctive and being different, but also involves significant

suffering.

Not increased comfort and ease and political success. Chapter after chapter, visions of the people of God are going to suffer in ways that turns Daniel's stomach and grieves him.

That he can barely bear to hear and watch. I need to remember that in one sense, this world should never feel like home to me.

I should expect persecution. I should expect leaders who have values different from God's. I should expect to be and feel out of place.

I didn't say those things shouldn't grieve my heart. But I shouldn't avoid them as though comfort and power or fitting in is the pearl of great price, the thing I must have.

[22 : 25] Y'all, the pearl of great price is Jesus himself, right? And my primary and distinctive identity is in Christ, a son of the King of Heaven, with an eternal inheritance that everything else will pale in comparison to.

So suffering and difficulty will come and they'll remind me to cling to my eternal inheritance. Like Moses did. Remember how Hebrews puts it when it talks about Moses?

By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

The reproach of Christ, suffering, difficulty for Christ to be of greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt.

[23 : 31] The success, the ease, the prosperity of Egypt. Why? How? Because he was looking to his reward.

Because something else over here weighed a lot more than all the treasures of Egypt. His eternal reward. His eternal homeland was infinitely more valuable to him than the earthly one.

Is this election cycle revealing what you value in a way you really don't like to see or admit? Have you lived in a church-saturated culture so long you expect to be at home here and fit in all the time? Have you forgotten your primary citizenship is in heaven? Not the U.S. of A., the Republican Party, the Democratic Party. Remember while you watch election returns Tuesday night, that nothing you win or lose, and nothing that that will gain you or lose you in the next four years is nearly as valuable as what you already have forever in your eternal homeland.

Watch him with that in mind. Seeing the eternal king on his throne gives us a right perspective on power, a right perspective on what's really valuable, and finally a right perspective on hope.

[25 : 05] Here's where I've struggled with this. I am one of the least cynical people I know. And I have become cynical the last few months.

Some of you may have struggled with the same thing. Some of you are in my generation, and we are good at being cynical. It is one of our great strengths. Cynicism is what we're known for. And maybe for any of us, the last few months have made you more cynical than you usually are. You may have become more cynical about politics. You've given up on politicians. Maybe you'd already done that.

You may have become more cynical about Christians. Given up on them. Regardless of who is elected, you're going to hear in the weeks ahead more of what you've heard a little bit of already about the demise of the church.

The evangelical church in America is crumbling and gone. One way or the other, no matter what happens, pundits will pronounce its end.

[26 : 14] But it's not true. Listen to the biblical perspective on hope versus cynicism. We, God's people, are promised eternal glory.

Remember all the verses we read earlier about the eternal kingdom and the everlasting dominion of the king of heaven? Listen to this. Daniel 7, verse 27. The kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven.

Seems like we've heard this before, right? Shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High. Their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom and all dominions shall serve and obey them. So that the last verse of the book of Daniel, chapter 12, verse 13, God says, Go your way till the end and you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.

This is where our story is headed. Right in the midst of some of the direst promises of suffering for God's people, an eternal hope dawns of glory.

[27 : 24] A promise that we will stand in our allotted place, ruling in glory forever and ever. The eternal future of the people of God, the church, is glorious.

Politicians promise hope a lot and rarely deliver. But the kingdom of Jesus is a kingdom of hope that always and eternally delivers.

You can count on it. Even when it doesn't feel like it, even when it doesn't change everything today, you can trust it. When you're tempted to give up on the church altogether, and you will be.

Remember that she is an institution, a community of hope. Oh, listen. Imperfect? Yes. Corrupt? Yes.

I totally get where all of the cynicism comes from. I've heard plenty of Christian leaders speak in the last months and write all sorts of stuff and almost every time I hear it, I wish they wouldn't have spoken at all.

[28 : 36] That's why I didn't want to say anything this morning. But, the church is a broken body with a promise of healing.

A corrupt group with a promise of purification. A lowly bunch with a promise of glory.

We have hope, not because we're better than the other people, not because our institution is free from the problems all the other ones have, but because someone is coming to redeem and rescue us from even ourselves.

How is it possible that we could have that kind of a hope? Only because we are amazingly, gloriously, and inextricably forever connected to King Jesus.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away and His kingdom, one that shall not be destroyed, and now, their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom and all dominions shall serve and obey them.

[29 : 49] They're connected to Him. One commentator speaks of this incredible grace this way, so the servants have no kingdom apart from their king and the king does not reign without His servants.

Jesus just cannot stand being separated from His people. What a great and gracious and glorious king He is.

Spurgeon's vision of heaven says it this way, if I may but see the king in His beauty, in the fullness of His joy, when He shall take by the right hand her for whom He shed His precious blood and shall know the joy which was set before Him for which He endured the cross despising the shame, I shall be blessed indeed.

Oh, what a day that will be when every member of Christ shall be crowned in Him and with Him and every member of the mystical body shall be glorified in the glory of the bridegroom.

What must it be to be there? Let that glorious vision impact your cynicism. We can have hope today in the midst of our cynicism.

[31 : 06] We must have hope Wednesday morning because Jesus is not up for re-election and the reality of our eternal King with whom we shall reign must transform our outlook today.

You remember when the early church when they had martyrs and they were burying them, you remember what they wrote on the tombstone. They would write the appropriate date of the martyr's death followed by the phrase in Latin *regnante Jesu Christo* in the reign of Jesus Christ.

They wrote that as a discipline to remind them of their only hope in those times when it didn't seem at all like the true King was Jesus Christ.

When cynicism made much more sense to remind them that indeed He was on the throne and would remain on the throne so they were eternally hopeful connected to Him.

When this life was indeed hopeless, there was yet hope. I need that plastered across my heart. *Regnante Jesu Christo* 2016.

[32 : 26] Friends, there is no power to match His power. There is no homeland to rival our eternal heavenly home.

There is no hope to outlast the glorious promise of reigning with Him forever. Might we indeed this week live as those who love our neighbors, who long for eternity and who hope only but always in King Jesus.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Jesus, you have won for us an eternal glory beyond what we could imagine. You've called us now here in this time and in this place where you've put us for the sake of your kingdom. Might you show us how to live and love others well for your glory.

And might it begin this morning with a renewed vision of heaven and of our King with whom we shall reign forever and ever by the glory of that setting our hearts at peace and on fire for King Jesus.
[34 : 00] Do that work in each of our hearts. We ask for his sake. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.