

“The Ruler of History”

Daniel 7:1-14

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on June 24, 2018 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- (SHOW SLIDE 1) On May 6, 1954 Roger Bannister did what most believed up to that time was a physical impossibility for human beings - he ran a mile in under four minutes – 3:59:40. But within 2 months, John Landy eclipsed Bannister’s new record by 1.4 seconds.
 - On August 7, 1954, the two met together in Vancouver for the British Empire Games. This historic race would settle who was the world’s fastest miler. In the first three laps Landy surged into the lead with Bannister content to remain a few yards behind. As they moved into the last corner, a dramatic finish occurred. Landy was haunted by one question, **“Where is Bannister?”**
 - In one simultaneous moment, the crowd of 35,000 leapt to its feet, Landy turned to look over his left shoulder, and Bannister flashed by him on his right to take the race in 3:58:80.
 - (SHOW SLIDE 2) Landy later said these words to a *TIME* magazine reporter: **“If I hadn’t looked back, I would have won!”**



- Brothers and sisters, I am convinced that a great deal of our present trouble in living out the Christian life stems from the fact that we do not keep our eyes fixed on the finish line. What is the finish line? It is the future. This life is like a long marathon that is filled with challenges and difficult stretches. The finish line is the future that God has promised will come.
 - Keeping our eyes fixed on the finish line is what keeps the Christian from becoming overwhelmed and discouraged with the exhaustion and pain of this life.
 - So I am doing a two part series that I am calling Living in Light of the Future. In this two part series I want to give us a glimpse of that finish line in order to strengthen us for the race.
- Today I want to look at how God is going to end history, and in particular, how he will deal with the destructive power of the nations. I want to give us this clear picture of the finish line in order to strengthen us for the race we are running.
 - So let’s get into Daniel 7.

INTRODUCTION TO DANIEL 7

- Daniel chapter 7 is one the most perplexing and exhilarating chapters in all of scripture. I will tell you quite honestly, there are many details here that I do not have a clue as to their meaning. But this chapter is filled with images. Since we are an image driven culture it should connect with us.
 - This chapter is written in an ancient style of writing called **“apocalyptic literature.”** This literature is much like our modern day way of communicating through political cartoons.

- Look at this cartoon for instance. **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** This is from last fall when Kim Jong Un launched ICBM that was be capable of hitting America. Now, are we to think that Kim Jong Un actually poked an giant eagle? Of course not. The eagle represents America. The image is meant to say that Kim Jong Un is a small little man and his actions were provoking giant and powerful country that could easily destroy him.



- Daniel 7 is like a movie of these type of images. We love movies and images because they help us know and feel truth in a way that bare facts can't do.
 - In the visual experience of this chapter we, like Daniel, are meant to feel the beasts, smell the beasts, and be overwhelmed with the beasts. Look at Daniel's reaction to this vision in verse 15, 28. **READ 15, 28.**

SCENE #1 – THE PARADE OF BEASTS

- Let's begin the movie. It comes in three scenes. The first scene is verses 1-8 and we might call it, **(SHOW SLIDE 4) "The parade of the beasts."**
 - **READ 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.**
 - The year is about 553 B.C. Remember Daniel is a politician in the Babylonian empire. At this time, the empire was being threatened by the Medo-Persian people. We are talking here about two world superpowers who are about to clash. It is the Soviet/American tension of the Cold War. Fear and apprehension fill people's minds for what the future holds.
 - Let's keep reading. **READ 2 - Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea."**
- Conjure up in your mind a dark ocean. As you stand watching on the shore with Daniel, verse 2 says the four winds blow upon it – that is winds from every direction howl over its surface, churning up turbulent waves in every direction.
 - In biblical and in ancient imagery the sea was a symbol of chaos and evil. And since the sea is being awakened this image is meant to evoke horror. It is meant to evoke dreadful anticipation – anticipation that in the words of Shakespeare "***something wicked this way comes.***"
 - The next verse does not disappoint. **READ 3 - And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another.**
- Like some evil sea-monster from the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies, we watch as four beasts come rising out of the sea one after another.
 - These beasts are anything but tame. They are the monsters of nightmares. They are all pictured in ferocious and violent imagery. Look at the bear – he has an insatiable hunger and with his might he

destroys all in his path. **READ 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.'**

- There is a leopard that with great speed crushes all others and rules with authority. But the fourth beast is the most terrifying. Look how Daniel describes it in verse 7. **READ 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.**
- What then are these beasts meant to symbolize? Daniel is given the answer in verse 16-17. **READ 16-17 - 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.**
 - The beasts then are empires. They are nations that are world superpowers. They are coming to shore to perform their respective roles in human history.
 - Nations have always been symbolized by animals. Russia is a bear, France is a fox, the USA is an eagle, and Canada, well...our animal is a beaver...but in the words of one of my favourite “I am Canadian” commercials, **“The beaver is a truly proud and noble animal.”**
- But the focus is not on the positive characteristics of the animals. It is highlighting the negative aspects of the coming kingdoms.

THE EMPIRES OF HUMAN HISTORY

- What Daniel saw was the future of human history, of actual empires, which would and did arise with these characteristics.
 - Most scholars believe that the four beasts correspond to the Babylonian empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greeks under Alexander the Great, and the fourth beast to the Roman Empire.
 - But these literal kingdoms are also representative of all nations that will arise in history. What Daniel sees is really a character study of all the kingdoms that arise on the earth. The kingdoms of the world behave like beasts. There is no question that the history of the world has been a history of violence, oppression, strife, bloodshed, and struggles for power.
- When we think of Rome we think of great architecture but we also think of the gladiators and bloodthirsty emperors like Nero. When we look at America we see much good in giving foreign aid and yet we also think of Vietnam and Roe vs. Wade. In Canada we kill about 100,000 of our unborn children every single year through abortion.
 - Recently the country of Iceland announced that it has eradicated down syndrome from its society through selective abortion. This was announced as a great triumph. But let us be clear on something – there is no such thing as down syndrome apart from people. To boast that you have eradicated down syndrome is to boast that you have eradicated *people* with down syndrome.
- A few years ago I had the privilege of being in Rwanda. What a beautiful country and culture. Yet what violence and bloodshed occurred in 1994 when 1 million Tutsis were slaughtered. I went to the Genocide Memorial in Kigali.
 - One quote stood out to me beyond the others. It said something to the effect of, **“Genocide is not the murder of an ethnic people group. It is rather the murder of one person, then the murder of another person, and then the murder of another person until a people group is wiped out.”**
- Here is the point that this first scene is making to us: **(SHOW SLIDE 5) History will always be dominated by the bestial conduct of the nations.** The beasts will come. Things are not getting better. History and nations have a way of repeating themselves. They still resort to war, violence, and bestial conduct.
 - Now at this point we should all feel just like Daniel in verse 15 – **“troubled in spirit...disturbed.”** What a bleak outlook on the world. Where is the hope? Is there any way to break the cycle?

SCENE #2 – THE KING AND JUDGE OF ALL

- But just when we are overwhelmed with this impending sense of doom, when we think we won't even finish running the race, we get a glimpse of the finish line.
 - Are you ready for scene 2? **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** Let's call this scene, "***The King and Judge of all.***" Scene #2 begins in verse 9. **READ 9-11** - 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. ¹⁰A 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.***
- In this second scene we learn that,
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** **God is moving history to a crisis point when He will intervene to rid the earth of all bestial empires.**
- What a different picture! Standing on that beach with Daniel our eyes are suddenly lifted away from the beasts and we see the very throne room of God.
 - What a sharp contrast to the vision of the beasts. Here we see the true King and the true Judge of the earth. Let me show you a few things.
- First, notice the calm nature of God's throne room compared to the chaos of earth.
 - Throughout history the sea is chaos. The beasts rage and devour. In the throne room verse 9 says that God sits. What a message to us. Though the nations rage, God is in complete control.
- Second, notice what God is called in verse 9 - "The Ancient of Days." What is the significance of that? Quite obviously the goal of every nation is to last a long time. Yet every kingdom falls and is buried under the debris of history.
 - Until this morning you may never even have known there was a great historical empire of the Medo-Persian people. But God Almighty is the Ancient of Days. He has always been and always will be.
- Notice thirdly that his clothing is white as snow and his hair is white.
 - Unlike the earthly kingdoms who are filled with corruption, His rule is one of pure righteousness. The white hair points to the absolute wisdom of age.
- In the fourth place, look at how many attend him. Verse 10 says billions of his people are gathered there before Him. What an encouragement to Daniel and to us when we Christians are the minority, when we often have to stand alone.
 - Lift your eyes brothers and sisters to the millions who have gone before you. You are not alone.
- And notice finally in scene #2 that in verse 10 ***the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.***
 - We are in a courtroom. The image of fire from the throne also points to this idea of judgement.¹ One commentator writes that the fire reveals ***“the blinding brilliant manifestation of God's splendour but also the fierce heat of his judgment on sin and on all those opposed to his supreme authority.”***²
 - Despite this blazing glory of God we read in verse 11 that the little horn was blaspheming. There is no shortage of opinions about who this little horn is. He seems to be a powerful ruler from the end of history. Many see this as the anti-Christ.
- But watch what happens. Don't blink or you will miss it. It is so anticlimactic. **READ 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.***
 - In every good movie or book the battle between good and evil reaches an epic battle for an extended period of time. In a book it goes on for a few chapters. In a movie there is an impressive battle scene that goes on and on. Not here. There is no battle because no one is a match for God. God shows up and it is all over.

¹ Psalm 50:3-4.

² Gleason Archer Jr., *Daniel*, 89.

- **God is moving history to a crisis point when He will intervene to rid the earth of all bestial empires.**

SCENE #3 – THE EVERLASTING KINGDOM

- Scene two fades out and scene three comes on the screen in verses 13-14. We could call this scene, **(SHOW SLIDE 8) “the everlasting kingdom.”** **READ 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. ¹⁴And 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.**
 - In these verses the finish line is clearly portrayed for us. In scene two we saw the removal of the negative but here we see the setting up of the positive. The main point of scene three could be put like this:
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 9) After ridding the earth of all bestial empires God will set up the everlasting kingdom of ‘one like a son of man.’**
- All that has been said in this chapter is meant to lead to this. These verses show that a fifth kingdom will come upon the earth. This fifth kingdom will invade the world. It will overthrow and utterly destroy all the preceding empires. All that was said about the beasts and their brutality has merely served as a backdrop to show the establishment of the kingdom of God on the earth.
 - In sharp contrast to the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian, Roman, British, French, Soviet, and American empires, this empire will never end. **READ 14b - his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.**
 - But the focus is not on the empire. The focus is on the emperor.
- Who is its emperor? Who is this future king? Notice two things about him:
 - First, he arrives on the scene in clouds of glory. **READ 13a - and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man.** Clouds are his carpet and identification mark.
 - Second, he is described as one **“like a son of man.”** He is not a beast but a man. And yet he is only **“like”** a man. He is human and yet not human. He is human and yet of heavenly origin.
- Why does he appear on the scene? He comes for his coronation. He comes to be given the crown of universal dominion over the earth. He is given supreme political power over the earth forever.
 - It is on earth that he rules. And as his people live out eternal years on the earth, they worship him and give him glory.
 - But who is this mysterious figure who rides on clouds of glory, who is like a son of man, whom God gives all authority to?

JESUS, THE SON OF MAN

- Fast forward 600 years from when this vision was given. John the Baptist raises a man out of the water after baptizing him. Suddenly a voice from heaven speaks saying of the man, **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”**³ God himself identifies Jesus as His Son.
 - And then all through his life Jesus’ most common title for himself is, **“Son of Man.”** Was Jesus really identifying himself as the mysterious figure in Daniel 7? The scripture leaves us with no doubt that He is.
- Fast forward to his arrest in Mt 26? There he is standing before the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, men steeped in the OT. Jesus is like a lamb who is at the mercy of the beasts.
 - The high priest says, **“I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God”.** Jesus says, **“Yes it is as you say...but I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven”** – in the future, coming on the clouds of heaven.

³ Mt 3:17.

- And the high priest tore his clothes and said, **“Blasphemy.”** They condemned him to death, spit in his face and struck him with their fists. They knew exactly who Jesus was claiming to be.
 - When Jesus ascended to heaven in the clouds, the angels told the disciples, **“This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”**⁴
- And so it will be. History is racing to that crisis point moment when,
 - **“The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”**⁵
- Revelation 1:7 says, **“Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the people’s of the earth will mourn because of him.”**
 - Behold a day is coming when Jesus, the Son of Man will come to wage war against the beasts of the earth and all who follow them. Out of his mouth will come a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.
 - Of the antichrist II Thes 2:8 says he **“will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and the splendour of his coming.”** No epic final battle. Jesus shows up. Jesus breathes. And all his enemies are decimated.
- On that day he will set up his kingdom on the earth and he will reign forever and ever. All who have loved Jesus will live out billions of years on the earth with him. Never again will injustice arise. No more beasts will arise. Never again will there be tears, death, or mourning. It will be eternal glory.
 - Can you see the finish line friends? It is coming closer everyday. And so we cry, **“Maranatha - Come Lord Jesus.”**

APPLICATIONS

- Now let me make two comments on how this should affect us.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 10) First, do not be overwhelmed or discouraged!**
 - Yes, this world is evil. Yes, life is difficult. Yes, the beasts are raging today as much as they ever have. But God is on his throne. God is ruling. He is not caught by surprise. And the day is coming when he will set up his rule.
 - When you find yourself overwhelmed by the state of the world and your own life, lift your eyes to the throne room and behold the Ancient of Days.
 - It is this vision of the finish line that brings us strength in the present. There is a verse in that great hymn “For all the Saints” that goes like this:

**(SHOW SLIDE 11) And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
and hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.
Alleluia, Alleluia!**
 - Are you overwhelmed by this life? Listen for that distant future song. It is a song of triumph. It sings of that great day when Jesus returns. Let it fill your ear. Let it fill your heart. It will fill you with strength to keep up the fight. It will fill you with strength to keep running when all you feel like doing is quitting. Do not be overwhelmed or discouraged!
- **(SHOW SLIDE 12) Second, make sure you belong to the right kingdom.**
 - The scriptures declare that every human being has rebelled against God. Perhaps you are here and still have not bowed your knee to Jesus.

⁴ Acts 1:11.

⁵ 1 Thes 4:16-17

- 2 Pt 3 says because God is ***“patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*** He has not come in judgement yet because to give you the opportunity to repent – to bow your knee, turn from your life of sin and follow him.
 - Do not wait any longer. If you call on the name of the Lord you will be saved.

CONCLUSION

- There was no gymnasium on a certain seminary campus, so the seminarians played basketball in a nearby public school. The janitor, an old black man with white hair, would wait patiently until the seminarians had finished playing. Invariably he sat there reading his Bible.
 - One day one of the students went up to him and inquired, ***“What are you reading?”*** The man replied, ***“The Book of Revelation.”*** With a bit of surprise the student asked, ***“The Book of Revelation? Do you understand it?”***
 - ***“Oh yes,”*** the man answered. ***“I understand it.”*** ***“You understand the Book of Revelation! What does it mean?”*** Very quietly that old janitor answered, ***“It means that Jesus is gonna win.”***