



The Lions, The Fire, and the Faithfulness of God

Sermon 5 - Daniel 7 – He wins.

SERVE WEEK REMINDER

Hey I want to make sure you are aware of what is happening March 10-17 here at Mercy. This is our annual ServeWeek which is like a **church wide mission trip to our own city**. Here's how we do it: we've got a handful of ministry partners that mercy members are serving with year round. And on that week, we just ramp up the work we are doing the rest of the year. It's also designed to help you, if you are newer with us, get off the sidelines and into the game. This week is filled with easy, entry level serving opportunities. We tell everybody that if you can take a day, half day, or evening or even just Saturday, we want you to sacrifice that time to serve someone else and to do it alongside others here at Mercy.

Listen, next week we start a new sermon series too called "The Way of Jesus" And the point is...we aren't just going to hear about the way of Jesus, we are going to try to walk in the way of Jesus. And Jesus loved serving those in need.

So to make it extra easy on you: all of our opportunities that still have space are available for you after the service to sign up for.

One of those partners is actually a school. We have had a relationship with Eastway Middle School for sometime now. We've cared for their teachers & staff, met some facility needs they've had and we are excited to take some new steps that are starting this week. Our independence campus will be holding worship services there at Eastway for both the 10th & 17th. It's a cool way to celebrate with them.

DANIEL 7 INTRO

This week we close out our series of sermons in the book of Daniel. Man this has been fun. This book follows the story of Daniel & his friends as they try to figure out how to follow God inside of a culture that doesn't know or follow the God of the Bible. And that's what makes this book of the bible so very relevant for us in our day.

1. it gives us a really noble example of what it looks like to try and obey God & live submitted to him in a world that just doesn't ascribe to that same belief system.
2. And the second thing it does is serve as a big giant billboard pointing us to our need for a savior. Because when we measure ourselves against Daniel, we fall short. We all do. We want the faith of Daniel and maybe we have it in moments, but constantly? Nah. So we need someone to be Daniel for us. And the Daniel Billboard is saying look at Jesus...the one who was

even greater than Daniel. Who lived fully surrendered to God and said he did that for us. Then took the payment for us. One thing the sermons last weekend majored on: Daniel is about Jesus. So Daniel inspires us to exercise greater faith & also comforts us by the greater love of God for us.

So that's where we've been. I say all of that to set us up for today. Today is a really wonderful super-hype finish to our series. We are going to look at Daniel 7. And Daniel 7 is all about hope. In fact, the message today is the core message of HOPE that Christianity is built on. Christianity is a hope-oriented belief system.

Think about this for a second: **all present hope is supplied by confidence in a future victory.** That make sense? Your confidence about something turning out good in the future supplies hope to you as you face your current circumstances. And the more confident you are about what will happen, the more positive and secure you feel now.

Example: UNC Basketball in March. Don Shelton records every game. He doesn't watch the games because its too stressful. Blood Pressure goes crazy. So here's what he does. He records the games and IF THEY WIN, then he will watch. Because they can be down by 10 in the second half and he can go "It's gonna be ok. I don't know how they are gonna get out of this jam, but they will. Cause I know how this game ends."

When I know how its going to end, my whole perspective changes. Present hope is supplied by confidence in a future victory. That's the purpose of Daniel 7. God knows Daniel is in hard time and he shows him a vision of how everything is gonna play out. And its for us too. To let us see what is GOING to happen at the end of all days...and for that certainty in the future to supply us with hope that will strengthen us now in the present. We get a look into the victory God has promised to deliver against all evil. Here's our main idea today

The Gospel offers powerful hope because it promises eternal victory

And I want you to walk away today very clear on the victory that is extended out to you through Jesus. This may be the clearest place in scripture where Jesus' ultimate victory is depicted. In fact Jesus quotes Daniel 7, more than anything else, when he talks about who he is. And listen church we are a people of hope. We come in here and we celebrate not just that Jesus rose, but that he reigns in victory forever and we share that victory. Do you understand that's what is happening each time we get in here? **It's a CELEBRATION of What Christ DID and an ANTICIPATION of what he's gonna do!** And life isn't easy. It's hard, there are a ton of UNCERTAINTIES in your life that produce FEAR. Which is why God gave us the church so that we could have at least one time a week where our hearts are recalibrated back onto a CERTAIN VICTORY that will create a HOPE and JOY that is stronger than the fear. And in the end... **Hope wins over fear....**Im' giving away the sermon...we've got to get into it

Last word: Daniel is structured where the front half is historical narrative. A re-telling of events that took place. And then the back half is a series of visions that Daniel had while living through the events. The visions are about the end times and they are awesome. I'm giving you one of those today, I love this stuff and hope we spend more time in it in the future, but today I'm giving you the big one from Daniel and probably my favorite. There are beasts with horns, chariots & rivers of fire, a battle for the throne. And I love it.

Now I probably need to say to you if you aren't familiar with this part of the bible or maybe you are skeptical about this type of writing: All it takes is a little time studying it and some really clear, hope-filled explanations start to rise up out of the text. And look it's the bible man. We aren't going to avoid passages that seem hard because we aren't used to them. God gave them to us for our good. And I think you are going to see that today! Ok Let's go.

I want to read the first 8 verses all together as one Section. This is going to show us what we have victory over.

In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel had a dream with visions in his mind as he was lying in his bed. He wrote down the dream, and here is the summary of his account.

2 Daniel said, "In my vision at night I was watching, and suddenly the four winds of heaven stirred up the great sea. 3 Four huge beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.

4 "The first was like a lion but had eagle's wings. I continued watching until its wings were torn off. It was lifted up from the ground, set on its feet like a man, and given a human mind.

5 "Suddenly, another beast appeared, a second one, that looked like a bear. It was raised up on one side, with three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up! Gorge yourself on flesh.'

6 "After this, while I was watching, suddenly another beast appeared. It was like a leopard with four wings of a bird on its back. It had four heads, and it was given dominion.

7 "After this, while I was watching in the night visions, suddenly a fourth beast appeared, frightening and dreadful, and incredibly strong, with large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed, and it trampled with its feet whatever was left. It was different from all the beasts before it, and it had ten horns.

8 "While I was considering the horns, suddenly another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. And suddenly in this horn there were eyes like the eyes of a human and a mouth that was speaking arrogantly.

The Bible is wild ain't it. Man if you are newer to the bible I imagine you thinking "Ummm how does this apply to Monday morning at work?" In fact, it's incredibly applicable. I'm telling you we are about to crack the code and you'll see how the end is going to play out. Now if you jump down a few verses you get Daniel's very common sense reaction to the entire vision. And it helps us with the first 8 verses.

15 "As for me, Daniel, my spirit was deeply distressed within me, and the visions in my mind terrified me. 16 I approached one of those who were standing by and asked him to clarify all this. So he let me know the interpretation of these things: 17 'These huge beasts, four in number, are four kings who will rise from the earth.

So the natural response is...ok who are the four kings? Different people view it differently but two main schools of thought. Most generally agree that this is similar to the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had back in Daniel 2. Where one kingdom would rule after the other. And each would become more and more violent and beastly than its predecessor. So the lion would be Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. He started off like a wild tyrant but then was humbled and became sane in mind. The Bear would be the Persian empire that took out Babylon. From there...well it starts to get into speculation because you are going BEYOND Daniel's life. Some Historians say the leopard is Greece under Alexander the Great and then the 4th is Rome.

While I think there is some sense there, I don't think we should label them because that isn't the main point. Especially don't think we should identify the 4th beast with a certain geopolitical nation state in history because it isn't "like" anything. It's just a BEAST. It's ruthlessness is like nothing the world has ever seen. It gets special attention later in the chapter so we'll come back to it. I want to pause though and show you what I think we are supposed to see...

The author wants verses 1-8 to make an overall impression on us. He wants us to feel a sense of terror and horror as we look at these beasts that have come up out of the sea and are trampling all over mankind. The image particularly of the bear with ribs in its teeth being told to gorge flesh. It's gruesome & horrific and the author is saying this is what happens with each new kingdom. It may promise peace but it will not deliver. Kingdoms will rise and fall and they will rise and fall through war & death.

Daniel is saying there is no kingdom of this earth that is going to bring an everlasting peace to the world. And the overwhelming testimony of history is that anytime a human builds a kingdom, it comes at the cost of blood. The last 100 years ALONE provide enough examples don't they? **Civilization hasn't gotten more civilized.**

The point is: don't be naïve about our humanity. Regime change, even ones that feel like 'progress', cannot cure the problem at the core of the human heart. You and I feel this. The more we try to control the people in our lives, the circumstances, the outcomes...the more we try to control our lives the more fear, anxiety, & anger actually end up controlling us. But this isn't just a personal thing. See Daniel is saying No political ideology, no kingdom CAN PROVIDE HOPE because the more power mankind tries to GRAB...the more beastly we start to act. British Lord Acton "Power tends to Corrupt" and "absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely."

So what these first 8 verses show you is that THERE is NO one who is going to rise up out of the earth who is going to rid the earth of blood thirsty evil. Evil is real. It is dark. It is beastly. And no kingdom or power from this earth will be able to stop it.

That's bleak right. But its real. And into that bleak picture, a big scene shift comes. Let's go a little slower here.

9 "As I kept watching, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was white like snow, and the hair of his head like whitest wool. His throne was flaming fire; its wheels were blazing fire. 10 A river of fire was flowing, coming out from his presence. Thousands upon thousands served him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was convened and the books were opened.

Ok so now Daniel's vision moves to these thrones, plural, that are set in place. And the Ancient of Days takes his seat. **That's God.** And here is what we are supposed to see from this:

We are supposed to see

1. order overtaking chaos. The beasts create chaos & destruction, but the ancient of days steps in and calmly takes his seat.

2. fury against sin. That's what the fire is. Everywhere God's presence shows up in the old testament, there is fire. It is a just and controlled fire though. Not out of control. It is the fire of justice against sin. That's why the court is convened and the books are opened. This is a courtroom session. And the evil beast is about to be judged.

3. We should see Majesty outshining terror. 10k x 10k stood before him which is not a fancy way of saying 100k, it's an artistic way of saying...there was a vast sea of people who acknowledge the rule of the one true God. They aren't being trampled like they were under the beast, they are worshipping.

You see the difference? Little aside...is this the God you pray to? When you sit down in the morning and I really encourage you to find space as often as you can to sit down...who do you envision you are praying to? Is it the Ancient of Days? You may pray on a couch or at a kitchen table but we should take ourselves to a GIANT throne room. Where the one on the throne is SO MAJESTIC, HOLY, & POWERFUL that we couldn't even touch him on our own because his fire would consume us. I'll get to how we approach such a God in a minute. BUT IS THIS YOUR GOD!? Now let me show you the final score. The reason we can have hope:

11 "I watched, then, because of the sound of the arrogant words the horn was speaking. As I continued watching, the beast was killed and its body destroyed and given over to the burning fire. 12 As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was removed, but an extension of life was granted to them for a certain period of time.

Do you see the simplicity of that victory? The ease of victory? In fact as we read on...it wasn't even a battle. The setting isn't a battlefield, it's a courtroom. And the victory is swift and decisive and as simple as the judge dropping the gavel. And what you have to see is that there is no challenging the authority of God. Whoever this 4th beast is...it is humanity's greatest threat of all time. And it is simply and permanently dismissed. And then one more shift happens...

13 I continued watching in the night visions, and suddenly one like a son of man

was coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him.

14 He was given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom; so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.

See what has happened? Remember how it said thrones, plural, were put in place? Well now the image is telling you here is one who looks human, like a son of man, but doesn't come from the earth like the beasts did. He comes from the clouds of heaven. And then when he is escorted in front of the ancient of days, he is given dominion over everything. See what is happening? This one like a son of man is sitting down on one of the thrones. Taking his seat.

And THIS RIGHT HERE...this is the spot Jesus continued to come back to when describing who he was.¹

6 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" — then he told the paralytic, "Get up, take your stretcher, and go home." -- Matthew 9:6

Again the high priest questioned him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"⁶² "I am," said Jesus, "and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven." -- Mark 14:61-62

Why was Jesus so insistent on referring to himself as the Son of Man? HE WAS TELLING US THE FINAL SCORE OF THE GAME!!! Cause he knew that there were going to be some tough moments and so he said:

I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world." -- John 16:33

The early church...listen the early church GRABBED ONTO THIS HOPE. You see it in the letters in the New Testament. I mean their eyes and hearts are FIXED on Heaven. And THEIR COURAGE to give their lives away day after day for the benefit of others...its because they knew the final score. They knew how the game was gonna end. And they drew on THAT JOY in the present. They were a people of IMMENSE Hope & Joy and they changed the world. That's what I want to be. I want to be one who believes his God is The Ancient of Days, That his savior has won the victory, and that the end of my story is standing with him in his glorious kingdom worshipping alongside you all where there is no pain or tears or evil. Just Celebration!

So let's get some handles to put on this. **What hope does the Son of Man offer you today?**

1. The Son of Man can set you permanently free from your sin

¹ Additional References: Matthew 8.20; 11.19; 16.13; 18.11; 20.28; 24.27; Mark 8.38; Luke 18.8; John 1.51; 5.27; 6.53; 12.23; 13.31;

Jesus sets captives free. It's what he does. I talked to multiple people this past week who shared stories of seeing Jesus set them or someone they know free from substance addiction. One was alcohol another was pills. Maybe your sin is an addiction like that. All sin is us trying to control our lives & trying to do things our way instead of God's way. And the bible says we are enslaved to our sin. We think we control it but it controls us.

And Jesus speaks into that and says

18 The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. -- Luke 4:18-19

Somebody NEEDS FREEDOM today. And the promise to you is that you will never win this battle on your own, but the score has gone final and Jesus WILL defeat Satan. He will crush evil. He will reign forever...And he says THAT POWER that dispatches Satan at the end...its at work right here and now. One person at a time. And you can have it today. He says repent and believe. He will forgive you and you can be free, today, from the power that sin has over you. The bottle you keep going to, you can finally be free from it. The body image you've been enslaved to...Christ looks at you and says I created you & I love you and you don't have to look like perfection because my love makes you whole. My love makes you perfect. You are released from that captivity.

2. The Son of Man will bring all those who believe in him into eternity with him

I told you Christianity is a hope-based faith system. The new testament writers are heaven-fueled writers. They believe that in the end, Jesus Wins and we who believe what he's done share in that victory. And so we spend eternity with him and eternity is rich. Read the last two chapters of the bible. Because you better believe the new testament authors were clinging to the hope described there. A beautiful city unlike anything you can imagine. Delicious food straight from the tree of life. Perfect peace, perfect celebration and joy with others. Heaven is described like a wedding feast. And I want you to understand that the promise of Heaven is ONLY in Christ. He's abundantly clear John 14.6 – I am the way, truth, life no one gets to the father except through him.

BUT THIS IS THE VICTORY OUR FAITH IS BUILT ON! DO YOU BELIEVE THIS? Every belief system has a "what happens when you die" answer. Most say "You will get what you deserve." Christianity says that if you surrender to Christ, you will share in his victory. In short, you'll get something far better than you deserve. But make no mistake, there is no hope of heaven apart from him. He makes that clear.

3. Our future victory supplies us with joy in present suffering.

The tone of the new testament is joyful anticipation of heaven. Because life was hard. And life is hard for some of you. But listen: We will see Jesus. 1 Corinthians 13, Rev 22, talks about entering heaven and seeing Jesus face to face. And it says THAT MOMENT...it's so powerful so great so good that present suffering can't really be compared to it. And this is the HOPE that has sustained believers for 2 thousand years.

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. -- Romans 8:18

THIS is one of the reasons why the book of Daniel is so treasured by the persecuted church. Because they aren't winning a military victory in this life. They aren't getting tax breaks for tithing. They are poor, oppressed, they are wrongly accused and imprisoned, and yet FILLED with Joy. Why? They are living in victory. They have victory over their sins. They are new people. And they are clinging to the HOPE that they will reign with Jesus in Heaven. So they can Say with Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego that my God is powerful enough to deliver me from the fire BUT EVEN IF NOT...He's better. And I'll be with him.

4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away. -- Revelation 21:3-4

4. Our future victory informs & empowers our present purpose

One of the things I really, really want you to leave Daniel with is a clear sense of direction for your life. That may be bold, but we need to be a people of purpose. See when Jesus left he told his disciples to go spread this news. That He's the son of man & people can have forgiveness and freedom from sin through him. And they start asking about Daniel 7 stuff. Are you restoring the kingdom now? He says don't worry about when.

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." -- Acts 1:8

Their job was to be a witness to what they had seen. Courtroom language. It's our job today. But we don't do that on our own...we do that with the POWER of the Holy Spirit with us. Which is where the power for our calling comes from.