

Sermon – 04/11/2007 pm

Kingdom for the Saints

Study Text: Daniel 7:15–28

In a dream Daniel saw four beasts coming up out of the sea. They were powerful, devouring beasts. The fourth one was particularly horrible and destructive with its ten horns and its little horn. Daniel saw the Ancient of Days take his seat upon the throne to make judgment. He saw the little horn get slain and thrown into the fire. Finally ‘one like the Son of man’ came and was given total and everlasting dominion. All the kingdoms of the earth were given to him.

What did all this mean? Daniel knew his dream was significant. His spirit told him it had some meaning. Daniel had interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams but what about his own dream. In his dream he approached what was probably an angel asking for the interpretation. We are later told this angel was called Gabriel (9:21).

The four beasts he was told *are four kings/kingdoms which arise out of the earth* (7:17). We have already suggested that in the first instance these are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome- and not UK, Russia, USA and a revived Roman empire as some suggest. Yet there is an overriding and enduring aspect to this conflict, the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world.

This chapter of Daniel has led to all manner of speculation regarding the future. Some link the ten horns to the ten toes of the image Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, the feet of iron and clay that were struck by the stone (2:35), but no emphasis is given to the number ten in that dream.

Some people closely watched the EU increase until it had ten members, but that has been passed. Others are watching the UN and the World Monetary Fund that was founded by ten of the worlds richest nations (the big ten) when they all went to Rome in 1971.

But this vision is not only prophetic; it is apocalyptic in style. The number ten should probably be taken as symbolic of a large number and not taken literally. Unlike the four beasts, no particular point is made about the ten horns or the three that are defeated. Even the four kingdoms are not actually named. We must interpret the passage in the light of the rest of Scripture, noting that this chapter forms the background to some of John’s visions in Revelation. John also writes in a prophetic and apocalyptic style.

Pompous Little Horn

Who or what is this little horn? Daniel was particularly intrigued by the fourth beast with its iron teeth and bronze nails. This beast, and especially the little horn that appeared on its head, had human-like features. Daniel was told that the ten horns were ten kings that will arise from this kingdom (7:24). The little horn was a king that would subdue three kings and cause havoc on the earth.

In what sense was this horn little? Was he diminutive in stature or insignificant in other ways? He was little but his *appearance was greater than his fellows* (7:20). If he was not easily seen

he was certainly heard. He was a bold and boastful blasphemer. He spoke pompous words against the Most High God.

Daniel tells something new about this little horn as he recaps on what he saw (7:20, 21 *cf.* 7:8). The little horn was making war against the saints and prevailing against them. The angel went on to tell him that this particular king will not only speak pompous words against God but will also *persecute the saints of the Most High* (7:25). Who are these saints? They are the followers of God from the old covenant and the new covenant. The little horn specifically targets the people of God in his ruthless destruction.

Some who interpret the fourth kingdom to be Greece point to Antiochus Epiphanes as the little horn. This ruler persecuted the Jews to the extent of desecrating the temple in 168-165BC. However, it is more likely to be a ruler from the Roman Empire who brutally persecuted Christians.

Calvin had 'no doubt that the little horn relates to Julius Caesar and the other Caesars who succeeded him'. 'He calls it a little horn because Caesar did not assume the name of king'. Others have looked to the rise of the papacy in interpreting this little horn. He is seen as the antichrist by many, an interpretation that extends well beyond that offered by Calvin. Yet the point is the same. This little horn, this ruthless ruler will persecute the saints of God.

The little horn spoke pompous words, he persecuted the saints and he sought *to change times and law* (7:25). God created this world, making time and setting in place the laws of nature. *Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are his, and he changes the times and seasons* as Daniel noted previously (2:20, 21).

At various times in history rulers have sought to change God's created order- six days work and one day's rest. With the French revolution came an attempt in 1793 to change the calendar to make a week ten days and three weeks to make a month. Other rulers have sought to change times and seasons but these come to nothing. Even today there are attempts to change times and seasons but God has set times and seasons in place and has declared that they shall continue until the end (Genesis 8:22).

John saw a beast come up out of the sea. This beast spoke pompous words and was allowed to make war with the saints and overcome them – for a time (Revelation 13). This beast was the servant of the Dragon or Satan. Satan always has, and always will, stir up his followers to persecute the saints. 'Wherever God's people have sought to carry forth his work and extend his kingdom Satan has tried to interfere'. But God has determined that this apparent victory will be only for a time, times and a half time (7:25)

Persecuted Saints

For a time Satan inspired persecution will prevail against the saints. They will suffer in this spiritual battle (7:21, Revelation 13:7). Jesus said that all who follow him will suffer in this world. He spoke of taking up your cross and following him. *In this world you will have tribulation* he said (John 16:33). The apostle Paul knew this when he wrote *all who desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution* (II Timothy 3:12).

Paul endured terrible persecution but he pressed on because he knew that this was exactly what Jesus had said. Is this what you understand to be the life of a Christian today? Do you expect to live without trouble and persecution in this world? Will you be one who turns back

when the going gets tough? Many did turn back from following Christ because of what he said.

The suffering of the saints will come to an end. The little horn made war against them until the Ancient of Days appeared. Daniel had seen him take his seat in the heavenly throne (7:9). He now tells more about this vision as he awaited the interpretation. He said the Ancient of Days made a judgment in favour of the saints of the Most High. He had previously focussed on the condemnation of the pompous little horn. This condemnation will be expanded upon shortly, but for the moment the focus is on the saints being delivered from the power of Satan and being given dominion in the kingdom (7:22). They would share in the kingdom that was given to the Son of man (7:14, 27).

‘How long O Lord’ is the cry that goes up from those who are suffering for their faith in God. The time is set by God because the victory has already been won. As Calvin understood this vision it pointed to the first coming of Christ. It was in his death and resurrection that the Son of man won the victory over Satan – he defeated him who has the power of death that is the devil. Satan is still on a leash as it were, and his ultimate demise will not be until the second coming of Jesus. But let us not forget that it is in his first coming that the victory was won. Satan is still active and even more active because his days are numbered.

Time, times and a half time (7:25). Many read this as three and a half years. John seems to pick up on this time and vary it to 42 months or 1260 days. This number is symbolic of the Last Days. The time appears to be progressing for the little horn one time, two times and then maybe four times. This would add up to seven. But instead it is cut short – one, two and then a half. This is for the sake of the saints (*cf.* Matthew 24:22). The time comes to an end with the court being seated and Satan being cast into the fire.

Proclamation of God

The vision and the chapter end in the courtroom of heaven. While the little horn is actively speaking against God and persecuting the saints the court was seated. The kingdom of this tyrant was taken away. It will be destroyed by order of the judge. ‘The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of God and his Son Jesus Christ’. And those who belong to Jesus, those who remain faithful and endure the persecution will reign with the Lord. *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (beatitude Matthew 5:10).

The courtroom scene shows Gods sure and sovereign judgment of evil. Let us keep this great truth in mind as we live in this world. We live in the shadow of the Cross, taking hold of the victory that Jesus won. We must not be ignorant about the reality and strength of evil in this world. Daniel was troubled by what he saw. He was living in the midst of evil. He was concerned for the saints of God into the future. Let us not become complacent but be earnest in prayer for the kingdom of God. Jesus taught his disciples to pray – ‘your kingdom come’.

We live looking to the glory of Jesus coming again with the kingdom of God in its fullness. Let us keep looking to Jesus and toward his coming. Let us keep on praying ‘even so come Lord Jesus’. This world is not going to keep on the way it is for much longer. Keep all this in your heart just as Daniel did.

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