Daniel 7 sermon

I believe that to fully appreciate our text from Daniel 7 we have to learn a little bit about the chapter as a whole, and the book of Daniel itself, please give me some time as I do some teaching in order to bring out the application more fully.

The book of Daniel may not be one that we read all the time. Yes, there are famous stories like Daniel being delivered in the Lions den and the Hebrew boys in the burning furnace, but a lot of the book has apocalyptic literature that has captured the minds of some but has sent many people away from it.

If I am honest, apocalyptic literature is fascinating for me because there is so much meaning in them, and the word itself means revelation. And what apocalyptic literature does is peel back the curtain that separates our world from the spiritual world. And what it helps us to see is that there is a supernatural world that is closely related to this one. And in the book of Daniel the first six chapters are dramatically different than the final six chapters.

The first six chapters give us a glimpse at the life of the diaspora living in Babylon and most of the scenes take place in the court of the all-powerful king and eventually show us that triumph of the Jewish diaspora, surviving and flourishing in a foreign land, in a hostile environment. It informs us of the powerful images of lowly Jewish exiles standing with faith and courage before the very throne of the occupying emperor and overcoming his military and political power through the power of God. The first six chapters of the book of Daniel really is openly hostile to the authority of the tyrannical ruler of Babylon who has come and waged war against the people’s homeland and can in fact be seen as one of the unifying factors in the first six chapters.

And this makes sense because we know that the exile was an experience of military defeat, deportation, and oppression in a new and strange land, which ended the days of independence for ancient Israel. Nebuchadnezzar ransacked Jerusalem and the temple. And as part of their policy the Babylonians exiled large sections of their conquered populations. And under imperial rule, subject populations and conquered territories were treated as sources of resources and labor. There was a huge military and administrative apparatus designed to secure a constant flow of goods from the periphery to the center. It was all about domination for the Babylonians, and gaining freedom for the Jewish people, and they gained their freedom through their faith in God.

 Now we get to chapter 7 and we are moving away from the dreams of the kings, and into the dreams, thoughts, and visions of Daniel himself. This chapter is the center of the book, the heart of the book of Daniel. It is almost as if the stories that have preceded it, have lead up to this chapter itself. It gives hope for the future.

To see this even more I must note that there is a chiastic structure to chapters 2 through 7. A chiasm is a literary device in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated *in reverse order*. The result is a “mirror” effect as the ideas are “reflected” back in a passage. And so chapter 2 has visions of 4 empires, that’s A. Chapter 3 is faithfulness of the Jews and their rescue, that’s B. Chapter 4 is judgment on the empire, that’s C. Now we go back in order. Chapter 5 is judgment on empire, thats C prime. Chapter 6 is faithfulness of a Jew and his rescue, that’s B prime. Then we get to chapter 7 and it’s a vision of 4 empires again, that’s A prime. Everything is leading to Chapter 7 and what will happen to the empires.

In chapter 7 4 great beasts come out of the sea, and in the Bible and especially ancient near east tradition, the seas represent chaos, they are anti order, and God is a God of order. Right the first thing we learn about in the Bible is God subduing the chaos waters with his word and creating all that we see and don’t see. And these creatures begin to wage war and to do battle. As can be imagined there is considerable debate about who these beasts represent, especially the fourth beast and its ten horns and the later three horns. It is not important for this message because its only speculation. Because I believe the elasticity of these symbols is what speaks to us in each and every age. For me it is almost as if the book is summarizing all the things that have gone on before, the pain, destruction, the turmoil and pointing toward the deliverance.

As Daniel is trying to understand what is going on the arena shifts into the heavens. And we are taken into another throne room. However, this throne room is different. We are standing before the king of Kings, before almighty God, in God’s throne room. And this is not some earthly king, this is the ancient of days, and he doesn’t just have a thousand people attend him like Belthasshar, he has a thousand, thousand, and symbols of his power are all around with streams of fire flowing from his presence. This throne room is much different, because this person has the power, and judgment is being passed, and that judgement on the beasts that have arisen out of chaos is doled out when the one who is like a human coming with the clouds is presented before the Ancient One. And the establishment of his kingdom means the end for the kingdom of the beasts.

Then Daniel will seek out an attendant and learn something. The last horn will make war with the holy ones, and was prevailing over them, that’s verse 21. They were near defeat, until judgment came in verse 22. The Ancient One came and judgment was given for the holy ones of the most high, and the time came when the holy ones gained possession of the kingdom.

This is the context of the reading, everything that is going on, the reason for the judgment. So lets bring it all together. And apply it to our lives. The Israelites are conquered and the Babylonians deport them and put them into labor camps and take advantage of them. They strip them of their identity by giving them new names and the Jewish diaspora is constantly in fight against the emperor. Then Daniels vision invites us to see that Babylon is a symptom of something greater. And its what Paul picks up on, that the fight with Babylon is a fight not against just the beasts, but the chaos from which they rise up from. That old ancient foe, Satan and his minions. That our true fight is not against a human, our fight is against the enemy the one who has been trying to steal, kill, and destroy humanity right from the very beginning. The one who is jealous of God and jealous of all that God has, is out to destroy it all. And above all he is out to wage war against the holy ones, against Gods people, to prevent us from doing what God has called us to do.

This in no way is to say that everything that happens to us in a negative way has nothing to do with us, because there are times when we face the consequences from our own actions as well. And at the same time we face a foe that is greater than us, as the great hymn states, on earth there is no equal, and because there is no equal on earth, we find his equal in heaven in the second person of the trinity, in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection is the judgement on the beasts because it is through his death and resurrection that he is seated on the right hand of the father and takes his seat on Davids throne, and we call him Christ the King. And this is good news for us.

The Israelites in exile got victory over the powers that be through faith and dependance on God, and we learn in Daniel 7 that we too get victory in this life through faith and dependance on God, because by ourselves we were losing, but because of Jesus the fight has been won, the tables are turned and we have the victory now, and we will have the victory in the future. Because we too are like the exiles we are in a foreign land because our residency is in heaven and we fight against a foe that wants to do us harm and run us ragged and do everything he can to deter us from putting faith in God. And yet, whatever it is that Satan throws our way, we win through faith and dependency on God.

Okay, so what does this look like. Let me give you a relatively minor example. Let’s say you are driving down Palmetto street and things are going great you get past Harris Teeter going toward McDonald’s and then you see someone in the turn left lane going the wrong direction to turn into the mall. Boy is that infuriating. The attitude of I am more important than anyone else is in every human and some have subdued it better than others, and I must think to myself Steven, this person is in the wrong, and yet there is something deeper. Satan is tugging on this person’s ego causing them to do this too. And so, I must keep my faith in God and depend on God for two things. The first, is patience, not to get upset to the point of anger and having sinful thoughts about this person. And second, I must have faith and depend on God and pray for this person’s deliverance from their ego and attitude of they are better.

The reason why its important to have faith and depend on God, is because what I have learned is that we live in a broken world. We do things well as humans, and we do things poorly as humans. And the best way to change the world is by changing the hearts of people. And the way hearts get changed is by putting your faith in Jesus Christ and letting the Holy Spirit take in and change you from the inside out. And this is only possible because Jesus is on the throne and judgment has been passed on the beasts, and his resurrection has brought the victory.

So, as we get ready for the upcoming week, when you face some adversity, I want you to remember your faith and to depend on God. Do not forget the fact that God is on your side.