

Dreaming of Messiah

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

Today is the last Sunday in the Christian calendar. As we turn the page on that calendar Advent starts the new Christian year next Sunday. I'm sorry I won't be here to start Advent with you but do look forward to sharing with you at least two of the Sundays in Advent and on Christmas Eve. Advent, of course, is that time each year when we prepare for the coming of the Christ child, Emmanuel – God with us.

As I sat with today's verses, I felt it a little strange to be reading about Jesus' second coming as we are about to celebrate his birth. It feels a little like putting the cart before the horse. But after consideration I thought "why not?!", God knew the end before the beginning. His prophets foretold Jesus' birth, his death, and even his second coming, long before John penned the Book of Revelation.

Let's start with a little back story on Daniel. He was a devout Jew who by his intellect and integrity earned himself a spot in the Babylonian court, even as an exile in that land. In chapter six of the Book of Daniel, Daniel found himself tossed into a den of lions due to his devotion to his God. The anxious King Darius, upon discovering that Daniel had been spared "wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth:

“May you prosper greatly!

²⁶ “I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

“For he is the living God
and he endures forever;
his kingdom will not be destroyed,
his dominion will never end.

²⁷ He rescues and he saves;
he performs signs and wonders
in the heavens and on the earth.

He has rescued Daniel
from the power of the lions.”

²⁸ So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”

It is this same God who gave Daniel a vision in the night, when Daniel was serving under King Belshazzar. In his vision he saw four great beasts rising out of the sea. In ancient literature the sea represented chaos and the beasts represented evils that contended against God. Each of these beasts were defeated by God. Then God, the Ancient of Days, appeared before Daniel on a blazing throne. His clothing and hair were as white as fresh snow which spoke to his purity and wisdom. On his

throne he had come to judge the earth. The river of fire before his throne flashed his ability to conquer any challenger.

Before the throne there were tens of thousands who sat as the court to judge the earth. When the books were opened every deed had been seen and recorded in those books, as nothing slides past God's notice. He sits in judgment and effortlessly executes justice. With just a word the greatest beasts, representing human kingdoms, are destroyed. Just as He created with just a word in the beginning, so even now with just a word he can destroy any challenge to his Holy Plan.

In Daniel's vision, once the beasts have been defeated, God gives rulership to a singular divine-human being called the "son of man." You will recall that this is a term Jesus often used to refer to himself. The eternal God gives the son of man, who has arrived on the clouds and been seated at his right hand, an everlasting kingdom over all the peoples and nations and languages. This kingdom, unlike the beasts, will never be destroyed.

What message would the exiles in Babylon have received in Daniel's letter? They would have been reminded that with obedience comes blessings and with disobedience comes disaster. They could look back and see where their disobedience to God had brought them to this place of exile. It was difficult for the exiles to believe that their God still cared about them. How would an apocalyptic letter bring them relief?

Where Biblical prophesy was intended to afflict the comfortable, apocalyptic messages comforted the afflicted. The people would hear words of hope, even if the message seemed anything but comforting. The exiles would relate to the beasts risen from the sea as the oppression of Babylon. While the exiles felt abandoned to the beasts of Babylonian captivity, Daniel pulled back the curtain to reveal the heavenly scene where God, seated on his throne, always faithful and true, and was still in control even when it seemed like evil has won. They understood that God had seen their condition and that he still cared for them.

Today we may feel like the exiles in Babylon. As we read, see, and hear news reports of chaos in the world, we can see those beasts rising from the sea in our minds. Take heart, the Ancient of Days still sits on his throne, and at his right hand sits Jesus. Jesus, who has dominion over all the earth forever. The son of man who with a word can defeat all his enemies. There are battles taking place in heavenly realms that we cannot see, but that are for our benefit. Let us not lose hope as we view the chaos going on in the world today.

Just as the Israelites were delivered from slavery through prayers of intercession; just as the exiles in Babylon were delivered from their captivity by prayers of confession and repentance; so we need to call out to God to bring the kingdom of heaven here on earth. Let us keep in mind that as believers, one day, we will see our heavenly Father and His Son, face-to-face in the fullness of their eternal glory. Then this life, its

questions and disappointments, trials and tragedies, will make sense yet will no longer matter.

This morning as we prepare to enter into Advent, even while expecting Jesus' return, may we keep in our hearts and minds all that Jesus has done on our behalf through his birth, life, death, and resurrection. Please pray with me.

Heavenly Father, how amazing and gracious that You would tell us the end from the beginning. Thank You that You loved Your fallen creation so much, that You would give Your only begotten Son to suffer so cruelly on the Cross to save humanity from their sin - such that whosoever believes on Him would not perish but receive everlasting life. Thank You that my sin was judged at the Cross. I pray that many who are blinded by Satan, the deceiving god of this age, would have their eyes open to the truth of the glorious gospel of grace, and be saved by faith. I ask this in Jesus' precious name, AMEN.

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