

**A Call to Christ-Centered Missions:**  
*Missions Strengthened by the Power of Christ (Daniel 7:1-14)*  
Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on February 26, 2017

**Introduction**

- ❖ One of my favorite stories in the OT takes place in 2 Kings 6. It centers around the prophet Elisha and how he was a thorn in the side of the king of Syria. Every time the king of Syria tried to surprise attack Israel, the army of Israel was always one step ahead of them. The king is convinced there must be a traitor among them leaking plans to the enemy. But one of his servants explains that there's no traitor among them, but there is a prophet among Israel who tells the king of Israel even what you speak in the privacy of your bedroom.
  - ▶ So the king of Syria sends a large army to capture Elisha, and they end up cornering him in the town of Dothan. Let me read what happens. This is **2 Kings 6:15-17**,  
*“<sup>15</sup>When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” <sup>16</sup>He said, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” <sup>17</sup>Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”*
  
- ❖ I've always been fascinated by that. **This passage is describing a reality imperceivable to the naked eye. There's an invisible realm of spiritual forces co-existing with the visible and physical.** We don't normally see this realm and these angelic beings. But they're there.
  - ▶ So when life gets overwhelming. When trials are before us. When enemies camp around us. When all we can see in front of us is frightening. In those moments, we need the LORD to do the same. To open our eyes. To remove the blinders. To lift the veil and help us to see that he reigns. That he's sitting on a throne in control. That he's victorious. **What we need is an apocalypse.** An apocalypse now!
  
- ❖ Now I know when you hear that word you automatically picture something scary. Something ominous. You're thinking blood moons or a meteorite hitting us or a nuclear war. Some kind of doomsday scenario. But the word just means *to unveil*. An apocalypse is an unveiling. So when I say when need an apocalypse, especially when we're frightened by what's around us, **I mean we need God to unveil the hidden realities about who he is and how he reigns.**
  
- ❖ And that's what Daniel chapter 7 is trying to do. What we find in the latter half of the book of Daniel is what's called *apocalyptic literature*. Most people assume that means it's just about the end of the world. So again, when we hear *apocalyptic* we picture something scary and foreboding. **But the first readers of Daniel 7 would've pictured something inviting and hope-giving.**
  - ▶ They were exiles living in a foreign land, under foreign oppression, thousands of miles from home. Israel's heyday under King David and Solomon was in the distant past. The nation was no more. It was just a backwater province within successive empires that we're much larger and stronger.

- ❖ So imagine how excited they were when the prophet Daniel finally put pen to paper and recorded the visions he received. No doubt they contain imagery that troubled him. At the end of the chapter he says it made him go pale – it made him change color (7:28).
  - ▶ **But for his readers, it was a welcomed sight to see – in the middle of this chapter – the veil lifted around a dark, beastly world to reveal the Ancient of Days sitting unchallenged on his throne and the Son of Man with all dominion and glory coming on the clouds.** That, more than anything, is what they needed to see.
  
- ❖ And for us during missions month, as we’re considering the task of proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth – this unveiling (this apocalypse) is exactly what we need to see. **The remaining task of missions will not be complete without missionaries facing terrible, beastly opposition on earth.** Most of the remaining people groups that need to be engaged and reached for the gospel don’t want missionaries telling them about Jesus. They will resist your gospel and reject you.
  - ▶ So this morning I’m praying for an apocalypse, for a revelation, for an unveiling to take place as we study this text. **I hope what we see comforts our hearts and strengthens our hands to finish the task set before us.** I’ve divided this text into three parts based on three effects it has on us: 1) Lips tremble at the beastly kingdoms of this world (vv1-8). 2) Mouths shut before the Ancient of Days in his throne room (vv9-12). 3) Tongues confess to the Son of Man in his global triumph (vv13-14).

### **Lips Tremble at the Beastly Kingdoms**

- ❖ As we begin in vv1-8, the imagery gets dark pretty quickly. That’s why I say it makes lips tremble. They tremble at the beastly kingdoms of this world. We’re told this vision comes to Daniel during the first year of Belshazzar’s reign, so chronologically he received the vision sometime before the events of chapter 5, at the tail end of the Babylonian empire. The first six chapters of the book trace Daniel rise in the ranks as he serves under two Babylonian kings, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, then the Median king Darius and the Persian king Cyrus. Those chapters were historical narratives, but once you get into chapter 7, the genre shifts and now we’re looking at **an apocalyptic vision**.
  - ▶ And what you expect to find in apocalyptic literature is a heavy use of imagery, symbolism, and word pictures to convey a message. **The aim is to *unveil* unseen realities in both the present situation and the future.** So what’s written has relevance to both the ancient and modern reader.
  
- ❖ Now when vv1-8 were read earlier, I’m not surprised if you thought we were reading out of the book of Revelation. That’s another example of apocalyptic literature. And just as I’m always apprehensive to preach out of Revelation, I was apprehensive to include these verses. **I was tempted to just start in v9 and skip the crazy imagery of these grotesque beasts crawling out of the sea.** Because once I draw your attention to these beasts, I know you won’t be satisfied if I didn’t try to explain who or what they’re referring to, but then it’s so debatable. So many different views. And so I thought about just ignoring vv1-8.

- ❖ **But if I did then you'd miss out on the necessary context, and the news found in vv9-14 would still be good but perhaps not great.** It would be like walking into a movie right at the end. It's like watching Star Wars (episode four) but starting at the point where Luke, Han, and Chewie are given medals for their part in destroying the Death Star. You have no idea what a Death Star is or how much of a threat it was.
  - ▶ Or starting the Lords of the Rings series at the end when Frodo and friends are honored by all the citizens of Gondor. You have no idea why everyone is bowing to four little hobbits. You have no idea how sinister Sauron and his army were and the threat they posed to Middle Earth.
    - That's why we can't skip these early verses in chapter 7. Even though there's plenty of disagreement over how to interpret these verses, it's worth wading into these waters. Because the verses I really want to focus on, vv9-14, will only shine in all their brilliance when preached against the backdrop of vv1-8.
  
- ❖ So let's dive into this section for a brief swim, but we'll do so with some humility knowing we're not going to solve all the interpretive issues. Let me read vv2-3 again, "*<sup>2</sup>Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. <sup>3</sup>And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another."*

  - ▶ **Having this vision open up with an image of a great sea being stirred up by the winds off heaven would've been terrifying to Daniel and his readers.** They would be anticipating a great horror on the horizon. You have to understand that, among ancient cultures, the sea symbolized the forces of chaos that threaten the world. The sea was dark and unknown. It was a scary place, the very source of evil and chaos.

  
- ❖ So imagine Daniel's horror when he sees four great beasts come crawling out of the sea one after the other. These are not PG-13, Jurassic Park kind of creatures. **No, they're coming out of the sea – that means we're talking about R-rated horror movie monsters.** Each one more grotesque and more evil than the other.
  - ▶ Now later on in v17 we're given the interpretation that these beasts represent kings or kingdoms on the earth. It's similar to a vision in chapter 2 that Nebuchadnezzar received, where he saw a great statue composed of four different metals (gold, silver, bronze, iron), and there Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire is explicitly identified as the head of gold (the first kingdom; the one that presently reigns).
    - So in Daniel's vision, the **first beast** – this amalgamation of a lion and an eagle – is typically identified as **Babylon**. And the plucking of the wings and the subsequent lifting up like a man is said to refer to the humbling and subsequent restoration of Nebuchadnezzar (recorded at the end of chapter 4).
  
- ❖ The **second beast** is described as a bear with three ribs in its mouth between its teeth and it's hungry for more. It's also said to be raised up on one side. The traditional interpretation identifies this beast with the **Medo-Persian** empire that conquered Babylon. It was an alliance between two nations, the Medes and Persians, but imbalanced with the Persians being the stronger of the two. That might explain the bear being raised up on one side.

- ❖ The **third beast** is another composite animal made up of a leopard and a bird with four wings and four heads. Tradition identifies it as **Greece**. The swiftness of a leopard is fitting when you consider the swift conquer of vast swab of land by Alexander the Great, and the four heads are said to represent the four generals who ruled the empire after him.
  - ▶ And then the **fourth beast** is described as being so terrifying, so dreadful, and exceedingly strong that there's nothing in the animal kingdom to compare it to. It's just a monster. The traditional view is to see this as predictive of the **Roman empire**, to which there's been no historical equal. Horns were symbols of strength among ancient cultures, so this beast with ten horns (five times the normal two) was massively powerful. That's an accurate description of ancient Rome.
    - Now this little horn, which arises above the rest – which is described as having eyes like a man and a mouth speaking great boastful things – this horn is hard to pin down historically. A number of historical figures have been proposed, but many interpreters think it points to a future antichrist.
  
- ❖ I know it's intriguing and we love to make guesses, especially if the Bible is pointing to things yet to take place in our future. But we need to be cautious. If we're too focused on identifying these four beasts with four ancient empires, then we might treat this as a historical exercise and just assume that our generation or nation is somehow less beastly.
  - ▶ That would be a grave mistake. **The number four could just be a symbol of completeness suggesting that, until the end of this age, the world will always produce kingdoms that are beastly and opposed to God and the mission of God.** In fact, if you read Revelation 13, at the end of the age there's a final beast that rises out of the sea, and it's a composite of a lion, bear, and leopard with ten horns.
  
- ❖ So we need to look around ourselves. **To look around our world today, and realize that beastly kingdoms opposed to God and the expansion of his kingdom still exist.** And we're living in one of them. Do our lips tremble at this? Likely not. We don't imagine these kinds of beasts exist today. We feel pretty safe and comfortable. What we need is an apocalypse – for God to lift the veil and to reveal the unseen realities around us.
  - ▶ **Finishing the task of missions won't be easy.** Even in our nation, I believe in the days to come we will face challenges to our ability to preach the whole counsel of God without coercion or repercussions. And around the world, it's even worse.
  
- ❖ I went to the **Voice of Martyrs'** website ([persecution.com](http://persecution.com)), clicked on the section of daily prayer requests ([icommittoprayer.com/requests/](http://icommittoprayer.com/requests/)), and in one day they're asking for prayer for a **Christian family in Southern Mexico** recently evicted from their village because they wouldn't renounce their faith and return to their ancestral beliefs.
  - ▶ Another request was for **house church leaders in China** who were recently given an ultimatum to register with the state church (TSPM) within the next two months or else. And a third request was for a **woman who converted from Islam** and her ex-husband has taken away her three children even after she was granted full custody because he doesn't want her to influence them for Christ.

- ❖ The prayer list goes on. **Let's not fail to recognize the reality that there are beastly kingdoms and beastly people all around the world opposed to Christ and the spread of his gospel.** Anyone who wants to be involved in missions needs the LORD to open their eyes to see the terrible reality that exists in the invisible realm all around the world. It's similar to the days of Elisha, but in our case we need help to even see the enemy.

### **Mouths Shut before the Ancient of Days**

- ❖ But once the veil is lifted and we can see these hidden realities, we need to keep looking and to fix our eyes on God. This leads to our second point. In vv1-8 our lips tremble at the beastly kingdoms of this world, but when we get to v9 our mouths shut as we are ushered into the presence of the Ancient of Days in his throne room.
  - ▶ Let me read starting in v9, *“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. <sup>10</sup>A 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.”*
- ❖ So after describing a succession of kingdoms that continue to rise and fall, we're now given the image of a being who's described as the Ancient of Days. **Unlike these fluctuating kingdoms, he never had a beginning and he'll never have an end. He always is, always was, and always will be. He's the Ancient of Days.**
  - ▶ His hair, as white as pure wool, signals great wisdom that comes with age. His clothes, as white as snow, symbolize his righteousness, his radiant purity. And his chariot throne flaming with fire represents his fearsome power as a divine warrior. It says a *“stream of fire”* will flow from his throne.
    - **Let's be honest, this is *not* how we tend to imagine God.** If we picture him in a white robe with white hair, we think of Gandalf or just some old grandpa. He's got a great big smile on his face. He just wants to hug you and spoil you with gifts and candy. But this is completely different.
- ❖ **Every Sunday morning, we talk about going before his throne in worship.** That's what we say we're doing here. But do we realize what that really means? What that really looks like? If the veil could be lifted for us this morning, many of us might think twice. We're way too casual in our approach. We come before his throne with indifference. But there is just no way you can be indifferent before this vision of the Ancient of Days sitting on a fiery flaming throne – unless you can't see him. Unless he's still veiled from your eyes.
  - ▶ Can you see him? **If your heart is indifferent towards God – if you're dealing with spiritual apathy – perhaps the problem is that the eyes of your heart are covered.** Maybe there's unrepentant sin in your life that's clouding your vision. Maybe you've been distracted by selfish ambition and vain pursuits. Whatever it is, it's keeping you from seeing. Repent, confess, and ask God to remove the veil!

- ❖ Now if you can see this Ancient of Days, then notice how he calls for books in v10, and he opens them up for judgment. What are these books? I believe they're the same books described in Revelation 20:11-12. **They're books that record the deeds of all humanity. Every one of us has a book being written about us on everything we've ever said, thought, or done.** Listen to this, *"<sup>11</sup>Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup>And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done."*
- ❖ And Scripture warns that no one will be excused from this judgment. Which, from a missions perspective, raises the urgency. **That means all the nations, all the peoples of the world, even the unreached and unengaged, have books being written about them.** All will have to give an account before the Ancient of Days. Every mouth will be shut before the Judge who sits on his throne. There will be no excuses (cf. Rom. 1:18-20).
  - ▶ Daniel goes on in v11 to describe seeing the judgment and downfall of the great fourth beast. *"And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire."* There's a parallel in John's Revelation at the end of chapter 19, the beast is captured and *"thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur."* (Rev. 19:20).
    - In Revelation 20 the lake of fire is mentioned again. The beast gets company. *"<sup>13</sup>And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. <sup>14</sup>Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup>And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."*
- ❖ These are some of the most sobering verses in the Bible. **Do you really believe this? Do you really believe the nations will be judged and found wanting before the Ancient of Days?** Do you really believe they will be thrown into the lake of fire, along with these terrifying beasts, along with Death and Hades itself?
  - ▶ Pray for your own apocalypse. **Ask God to unveil before your eyes the eternal realities that confront the nations. That you might clearly see the lostness of the lost among the peoples of the earth.** May your heart break for them. May none of us be at peace until they hear. Until the peoples of the earth get a chance to hear the good news of the Son of God who became the Son of Man for us and for our salvation.

### **Tongues Confess to the Son of Man**

- ❖ That leads us to our final point. In vv1-8 our lips tremble at the beastly kingdoms of this world. In v9 our mouths shut in the presence of the Ancient of Days who judges the nations. But now in v11 tongues confess to the Son of Man because of his global triumph. Because he's been given dominion over all peoples, nations, and languages.

- ❖ Let's keep reading in v13, "*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. <sup>14</sup>And 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.*"
- ❖ What's been pointed out by commentators is that, in these verses, we no longer have descriptions of animal-like beasts but human-like characters. **Evil human kingdoms are described as horrifying amalgamations of various animals, but notice how divine beings are described as human beings.** Which makes sense from a biblical worldview considering how, out of all creation, only humans are created in God's image.
  - ▶ We're told in Genesis 1 that Adam, the original son of man, was created by God and given dominion over all the fish of the sea, birds of the air, and the beasts of the earth. **But by Genesis 3, the first son of man forsook his dominion. He failed his vocation by allowing a beast, in that case a serpent, to exercise dominion over him.** And now all of creation has been turned upside down. We're in a fallen world where beasts rule. Where beastly kingdoms reign terror over the earth.
- ❖ That's why it's so significant when it says that one like the son of man appeared before the Ancient of Days to receive dominion and glory and a kingdom. **What this son of man is doing is reversing the effects of the Fall.** God always intended from the beginning for a son of man to exercise dominion over the earth. It was lost, but now in chapter 7:14, Daniel sees a reestablishment of that dominion – an everlasting dominion given to a son of man.
  - ▶ But this is no mere son of man. This is not just a son of Adam, a mere mortal. **We know that because the image of coming on the clouds was a clear symbol of divinity.** There are plenty of instances in the OT of God being associated with clouds or riding on the clouds (cf. Ex. 13:21; Lev. 16:2; Ps. 68:4; Isa. 19:1).
- ❖ That's why by the time of the NT, when Jesus is standing on trial before the Jewish leaders, they ask him if he's the Christ. And he answers, "*I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.*" (Mk. 14:62)
  - ▶ And it says the high priest tore his garments and accused Jesus of blasphemy and condemned him to death. Why? Because he called himself the Son of Man and said he'll be riding on the clouds? How is that blasphemy? **It's only blasphemy if this Daniel 7 Son of Man figure is more than a man.** If he was understood by the Jews to be God. If so, then identifying yourself with this cloud-riding Son of Man *is* blasphemy. Unless you truly are God. It's not blasphemy if you're a God-man.
- ❖ **This is why "Son of Man" was Jesus' favorite title for himself because it captures the incongruity of him being both human and divine.** His first disciples had to be reminded of the humanity and humility of the Christ. They had to learn the lesson that salvation doesn't come through a powerful heavenly being bearing a sword – but through a humble son of man who willingly falls on a sword to save you.

- ▶ When Jesus sacrificed himself on the cross he said, “*It is finished.*” He meant he finished atoning for sins – paying for the sins of those who trust in him. **So when the Ancient of Days goes looking through those books, when he looks through the book of a Christian, the words “*It is finished*” will be written all over it. And when he looks into the Book of Life, he’ll see your name written there.** That kind of salvation only comes by a Christ who is a man – a humble son of man.
  
- ❖ **But for the readers of Daniel and believers today, we need to be reminded of the divinity and dominion of the Christ.** We live in a day of monstrous beasts, of hostile nations and persecuting governments, of institutional systems that suppress and exploit the weak.
  - ▶ Disciples today need to learn the central lesson of Daniel 7. That the Son of Man has been given dominion, glory, and a kingdom. Jesus has the divine right to rule over all heaven and earth – over all peoples, nations, and languages. There is no greater power to overrule him. **You’ll never have to worry about his authority being usurped.**
  
- ❖ So think about it. When he said, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*” (Mt. 28:18-19), **Jesus essentially took the authority he received from the Ancient of Days, and he delegated it to us – to his Church.** He sends us out to the nations, to go and make disciples, with his authority – with his dominion and power!
  - ▶ And that makes all the difference. **Whatever fear, whatever obstacle, whatever hesitation is holding you back from joining God in his global mission to preach his gospel and make disciples of his Son among all the nations – just remember that Jesus is stronger.**
  
- ❖ He has all dominion, all authority, and he has delegated it to you. What are you afraid of? Of what people might think? Of what your parents might say? Of being rejected by those you're trying to reach? Of having to sacrifice the comfort or lifestyle you're grown accustomed to? Remember, Jesus has *all* dominion, *all* authority. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.