

Last week's lesson was largely a reading of Daniel 4:4-37 and 7:9-14 with a few comments on these passages. In response to the recent unrest on Capitol Hill, I wanted to read these passages in order to be reminded of the truths about the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. Since I cannot include the entirety of these passages, I will give a summary of them with some quotes and explanatory comments. Before looking at the passages, recall what you know about Daniel and the king Nebuchadnezzar, for these are the two main characters in the story. Here is some helpful background information for our purposes today. Daniel, along with his three famous friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were young Jewish men that had been deported to the grand city of Babylon when Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians, led by Nebuchadnezzar. These young men were sent to the royal court of king Nebuchadnezzar in order to be educated in the ways of Babylon. Eventually, Daniel was promoted within the king's court as a well-trusted advisor since he could interpret disturbing dreams with the help of God.

In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar narrates a time when he startled by a vision that he saw while he was at ease in his palace. Since he did not understand this dream, he summoned all of his magicians, enchanters, and astrologers to explain what his dream meant, but none of them could answer him. So, king Nebuchadnezzar sent for Daniel since he knew that he was blessed with divine aid in interpreting dreams. When Daniel arrived, the king told him his dream. He dreamt about an enormous tree that stretched up to heaven and across the whole earth. The tree's leaves were lovely and its branches bore bunches of fruit, which was food for the entire earth, both man and beast. But then, in his dream, an angel appeared and announced that the tree must be chopped down, its branches lopped off, its leaves stripped, and its fruit scattered. Yet, the stump with its roots was spared. The angel said, **"Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him"** (4:15-16). The angel said that the reason this has happened is so that **"the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men"** (4:17).

When Daniel heard the king tell him about his dream, he was greatly alarmed because he knew what it meant. Daniel said that the big, beautiful tree in the vision was Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar's greatness had grown so that his empire had reached a large part of the world, similar to the spread of the limbs of the tree. Yet, Daniel reminded him that the dream included this tree being felled. Daniel told the king that God has decreed that **"you shall be driven from**

among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (4:25).

Take a moment here to think about what God teaches us through the repeated lines in Daniel 4. Nebuchadnezzar is going to be demoted to a beastly state in order to learn that Heaven rules over the earth. God’s power is impressive. No one is more powerful than him, which means that nothing can stop him from doing what he wants. God’ will is accomplished in every detail of the world, even in who becomes king. God is in control of the sparrows that pick at seed and the presidents who sit in the Oval Office. He gives the government of the United States—along with other nations—to whomever he wills. God even gives the right to rule to wicked men: he gave the throne to Nebuchadnezzar, who worshipped false gods and burned Jerusalem, his holy city. Does this mean that God approves of an arrogant ruler if he gives him his position of authority? No, it does not. God hates evil, but he will allow it as he works against it for the good of those who love him. In his power and wisdom, God is working all things for our good and his glory.

After Daniel revealed the meaning of the dream to Nebuchadnezzar, he gave him some solemn advice to repent of his sins because that could give him longer time of prosperity before he met his fate. A year later, Nebuchadnezzar was walking on the roof of his royal palace and surveying his glorious city. (Truly, Babylon was spectacular during his reign. The city had high walls surrounded by water. A river ran through the middle of it, which watered the famed hanging gardens, which were numbered among the seven ancient wonders of the world. The city also had a grand entrance, the Ishtar gate, which was painted blue and decorated with tiles in the shape of fierce lions, bulls, and dragons.) While he looked around, he praised himself for establishing a marvelous kingdom by his own power. Immediately, a voice from heaven told him that **“the kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men”** just as Daniel had told him when he interpreted his dream (4:31-32). Once the voice finished speaking, Nebuchadnezzar was given the mind of a beast and he went mad out in the wilderness, eating grass and growing his hair and nails long. Eventually, Nebuchadnezzar came to his senses and praised God, acknowledging that God is the one in charge of establishing the kingdoms of men on the earth. Then, he ceased to act like an animal and he returned to his palace as king.

Before moving on to the final passage of this lesson, think about the conclusion of this

story of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar. In a moment of self-glorifying pride, Nebuchadnezzar is judged by God and transformed into a wild man. Nebuchadnezzar forgot the valuable lesson that God is in control of all things and that he was under God's authority. God had given Nebuchadnezzar his power and his greatness, but Nebuchadnezzar was not thankful, but boasted in his own abilities. Pride is corrosive to those in leadership. The Bible teaches us that we are all prideful like Nebuchadnezzar. We all are not thankful to God as we ought. We do not acknowledge him in all our ways; we do not acknowledge that he is the one who provides everything to us. Our talents, skills, knowledge, family, friendship, food, shelter, clothing, and breath all come from his generous hands. All that we have are gifts from him. If we deny this, then, like Nebuchadnezzar, we will be living a lie, with a corrupted mind more like an animal than like a dignified man or woman made in the image of God. When we are arrogant, we think that we are higher than others, but really, we are sinking lower than what we were made to be.

Our final passage in Daniel is chapter 7, where God gives his kingdom comprising of all the nations to one like a son of man. In verses 9-12, God sits on his seat of judgment and decides to do away with the kingdoms of mankind. Then in verses 13-14, Daniel says, **“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. 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.”** While the rest of the earth's kingdoms crumble, God's gives his kingdom to a man, who will rule over the rest of the nations and will never die. Remember that Jesus calls himself the Son of Man, even with descriptions that echo this passage in Daniel. Jesus is the Son of Man who receives the kingdom from the Father and establishes peace over the whole earth. As Christians, we must remember that we are citizens of the kingdom of God first, and then citizens of whatever country we dwell in. Therefore, we cannot prioritize our country over our church. We must care about our country greatly, but we cannot confuse American government for God's government. Thankfully, we as Christians have a hope beyond whatever happens in our country—and from the looks of it, things are looking desperate—we have a permanent kingdom where peace, love, righteousness, justice, virtue, and truth exist purely and eternally. Best of all, in this kingdom, God is there. God is there and he dwells with man. We will know him forever, and he will feed us from the abundance of his house and drink from the river of his delights.