

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF END TIME

CHRIST THE KING

If I Were King...

Daniel 7:13-14 (NIV)

¹³ "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Daniel had a dream, a vision. This chapter of his book is the record of what he saw. There were four beasts one right after another. (slide #2) The first beast was like a lion with the wings of an eagle. The wings were torn off and the beast was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human being and the mind of a human was given to it. (slide #3) The second beast looked like a bear with the distinguishing feature of having three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. This beast was told to eat its fill of flesh. (slide #4) The third beast looked like a leopard, but it had four wings and four heads and was given authority to rule. (slide #5) Then came the final and most terrifying and frightening of the beasts. It was powerful with large iron teeth. It crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It also had ten horns.

And then the vision gets weirder. A little horn on this fourth beast came up among the other ten horns, uprooting three of the first ten horns in doing so. This new horn had eyes like a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully. (slide #6) Then Daniel sees the Ancient of Days, the one who is, who was, and who is to come, God himself. Court was in session. That little talking horn was judged, yet it kept speaking until the whole beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire and all the other beasts were stripped of their authority but were allowed to live for a period of time.

Then comes the portion of the vision that we already heard. (slide #7) Another person enters the picture, who looks nothing like the four beasts. Daniel sees one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. "He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." (verses 13-14)

Daniel was troubled and disturbed by what he saw. He didn't understand it. He asked God about the meaning. He was told that the four beasts are four kings that will rise from the earth: the Babylonian Kingdom, the Medo-Persia Kingdom, the Greek Kingdom, and the Roman Kingdom. The ten horns of the fourth beast are the kingdoms that would rise after its death. These kings would speak against God and oppress God's people until they are delivered. Then the one like a son of man will rule with an everlasting dominion, a kingdom that will never be destroyed.

Even after the explanation, Daniel was deeply troubled. He turned pale, sick to his stomach. What was going to take place on this earth with these beasts, these kingdoms, was going to be horrible.

Maybe you've been feeling sick to your stomach over these past couple of weeks, maybe longer. You see it, don't you, these kingdoms coming from the fourth beast who oppress the people of God? You see the wickedness and the violence. You've maybe experienced it firsthand as it has come into your life.

God, you have recorded these words for us in Daniel telling us that Jesus, the Son of God and God himself, has all authority and sovereign power. If he has all power, why is he not using it for our good? If he has all power, why is he not stopping the violence, fixing this broken world? Why is he not preventing wickedness? Why not just end the beasts and their power right now?

(slide #8) If only I were king. (slide #9) If I were king, I would fix all these problems. If I were king, I would not allow people to strap bombs to their chests and kill a crowd of innocent people. If I were king, I would stop murder. If I were king, I would stop rape, greed, discrimination, all violence in every form that it comes in. I would use that kingly almighty power to stop all the evil right now.

As we fume on what seems to be righteous indignation that Christ the King is not functioning as a good king, we judge him according to our expectations. We judge him to be inoperative and inadequate as king because he is not exerting his power in a way that I think he should. He is supposed to fight my battles. He is supposed to take care of me. He should not allow evil happen to me or to those around me. He should not allow me to be distressed in my life if he truly is in control.

How would we do if we were king? As we look at this world and how we would change it, we tend to look only at the here and now. Stop the violence today. Take care of me and my loved ones physically today. If I were king, I would be focused only on what my eyes can see, and, honestly, I would make errors in judgment. I would probably condemn when I ought to have mercy and have mercy when I ought to condemn. As a person, I could only rule according to what I see before me.

(slide #10) Jesus' kingdom is not like the kingdoms we see on earth. His kingdom is nothing like the four beasts pictured in Daniel's vision who look all sorts of scary but have no lasting power. Jesus explained about his kingdom, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." (John 18:36) Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, but it is in this world. It is something else, something beyond the physical. It is a spiritual kingdom. As King, Jesus looks beyond what we see day to day to rule for the benefit of a kingdom that will never end. Christ rules over all things so that he can bring the most people to heaven.

We think having authority and power in ruling means to make a better life for people physically. Christ uses this power and authority for something higher than just taking care of our physical needs. He rules to get as many people possible into his kingdom by bringing them to believe in him as their King, as their Savior. So instead of creating a utopia on earth where he controls all our actions and we have no free will, no conscience decisions, he instead continues to preserve and prosper his Word for our benefit.

Think about it. If Christ were not ruling, would his Word have survived to today? How many regimes and kingdoms have tried to snuff out Christianity, have held book burning parties of the Bible, have persecuted and killed Christians? If Christ truly were not in control, his Word would have disappeared because of the wickedness of earthly kings, of us.

Christ does not control us as if we are robots or slaves. If we want to rebel against him, if we want to do wicked and evil things, he allows us to make that choice. The ownership of the wickedness, though, is ours. We make the wicked decisions. We bring evil to people. Christians will suffer because of ungodly choices we make. That's on us, not God.

What's more is that Christ our King doesn't summarily execute everyone who breaks his laws or anyone who might commit violence, who can and does sin. No, out of his great mercy, he allows evildoers like us to exist. He is patient with them because he does not want them to perish, but to come to know him, to be brought into his kingdom through his Word, to believe that he is their King and Savior and so be saved. That includes him sparing me, even though I am not perfect. I have wronged God. I deserve no good thing.

If you were king having all authority and power, you would stop the violence, as you can, but would you have mercy to those who deserved none? Would you allow the evildoer to live so that they could come to know that they have a Savior from sin? Would you give the people who commit violent acts chance after chance to belong to the kingdom of God?

This is why it is not only a good thing, but a great thing that Christ is King instead of us. He does rule. He keeps the truth preserved and continues to grow his church with each new person that hears what he has done for them, who hears that our King, Jesus Christ, went into battle against Satan and came out on top, the one who died only to come back to life and be the firstborn from the dead. He was pierced for our transgressions. He suffered so that no earthly government, no evil king would have permanent reign over us. Christ our King freed us from our sins by his blood and made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve him.

While we continue to be evil, Christ our King continues to have power over all things in order to turn us from our wickedness and bring us into his kingdom, to continually gather more and more people to be with him in heaven. Christ our King sacrificed himself so that we would belong to a kingdom where evil will be one day completely stamped out and eradicated. All earthly kingdoms will pass away; they will not last, as Daniel's vision showed us, as history has shown us. But authority and sovereign power was given to the Son of Man. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away. He will not let his Word, his message of salvation, pass away. He's kept that promise for the entirety of human history thus far. He promises to continue to rule in the way that will bring more people to faith, that will continue to preserve his message of salvation from sin and preserve his Church, the kingdom of believers.

This is why we honor Christ as King. His kingdom will never fade away because he is in control. He has been given the authority and power and he uses it to preserve the Church, us. So no matter how boastful the kingdoms of this world get, Christ the King remains King. No one can take his rule from him. As King, we trust that he will deliver us from evil and many more people yet to come because his is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.