What's Right in the Upside Down

Daniel 7:1-28
Key Verse: Daniel 7:14
“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.”

As I prepared for this message I learned there are several ways that the book of Daniel can be divided. First by language. I didn’t realize this but there are Hebrew sections, chapters 1, 8-12 and there are Aramaic sections, chapters 2-7. The first half of the book, the first six chapters are historical. They are about Daniel and his friends who have been taken into captivity in Babylon. And as the book continues, we begin to see this battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. At first, the battles are small as Daniel and his friends refuse to eat the king’s food. As time goes on the battles get larger and the stakes get higher, interpret this dream or be killed, worship this idol or be burned alive. After that, Daniel begins to serve another king and it becomes: if you worship God you will be thrown into the lion’s den and so there is continued opposition between the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God. However, though it all God was revealing the superiority of his kingdom to the earthly kingdoms. Even in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, it was as if God was telling him through Daniel, “Nebuchadnezzar, you think you and your kingdom are great, but you’re not. In fact, your kingdom’s going to fall and it’s going to be replaced by another kingdom and then another kingdom and then another kingdom and it’s going to continue throughout history until a final eternal kingdom comes, God’s kingdom comes.” That pretty much summaries the first six chapters of the book.

Then in chapter seven, we get into the prophetic portion of the book where Daniel has these visions and he gives these prophecies that have to do with the future that goes out even beyond Israel’s exile. So, as we get into chapter seven of Daniel we’ll notice some changes. Some scholars believe that chapter seven is the most important chapter because it’s a bridge between the first portion of the book, which is historical, and the last portion of the book which is prophetic. Revealing that there is a connection between what has happened and what is to come, history and the future are connected. Even though the style of writing has changed, we are still talking about the same message given from the same messenger.

Let’s get it started, take a look at verse 1, “In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying in bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream.” In this verse, we see a couple of things, first, the book is no longer going in chronological order. This chapter jumps back in time before chapter five, before Belshazzar’s writing on the wall. We are kind of getting a “behind the scenes” view of what happened. Second, Daniel is now seeing visions in his mind, whereas before he was interpreting other people’s visions. Daniel first came on the scene as he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream about the statue which is actually a parallel of Daniel’s dream in this chapter. When Daniel interpreted

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Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he was made chief among the magicians but now he no longer enjoys that position of power, in fact he seems to have been forgotten. And it's at this time that God comes to him with a dream and a vision. In contrast chapter 2, Daniel was a young man raised to power interpreting the dreams of others, but in this chapter, he is a forgotten old man having dreams of his own. In chapter 2 after the interpretation of the dream, Daniel goes from being a prisoner of war to the second most powerful man in the nation, and the most powerful man in the nation went through a wild transformation and begins to praise his God, and then in the very next chapter, everything's gone and the new king doesn't even know Daniel's name.

Can you imagine what this period in Daniel's life must have been like. He saw all that had happened to Nebuchadnezzar, and he begins to understand the meaning of the dreams. He understands that there will be an end to the exile. And the king who may have been his ally is gone and another king has come and doesn't even know his name. Daniel's been forgotten. And then one-night, God comes to him in a dream. The previous dreams were God's message to godless people, now God's message is to his people. Earlier, God's message came THROUGH Daniel, now God's message is FOR Daniel. God is speaking to his people to encourage them in the midst of their exile.

Let's see what this vision is about, take a look at verses 2-8. "Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. **4** "The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it 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. **5** "And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!' **6** "After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule. **7** "After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns. **8** "While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully." As this vision unfolds the first thing we see is four winds coming from heaven to earth and they begin to stir up the sea. The stirring up of the sea, draws this image of conflict, turmoil and instability on the earth, but it's not a natural turmoil because it didn't start in the sea, but it's a supernatural turmoil because it comes from heaven. It has the feeling that this is something that is being directed from heaven. The word "winds" can be compared to the Spirit of God. Genesis 1:2b says, "The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." Before God spoke, there was the Spirit of God and he was hovering over the "waters." And as the sea, with its waves, churning and tossing violently, one beast after another rises up out of the turmoil. This conveys the idea that the future is turbulent. God is not promising Daniel that after the exile is finished that everything will be ok; the world will

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be a nice place and everyone will be at peace. In fact, he's guaranteeing the opposite. The world is never going to be a nice place. The world will always be a turbulent place. That is, until….. the end comes.

Thankfully, Daniel gives us an interpretation of his dream otherwise we would have no idea what it means. We'd be lost. Take a look at verses 16-17, " I approached one of those standing there and asked him the meaning of all this. "So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: **17** 'The four great beasts are four kings that will rise from the earth." In the interpretation here is what we discover, the beasts represent kingdoms, four separate beasts for four separate kingdoms. And these beasts are not cute and cuddly but extremely violent. And all of us sitting here have the advantage of hind sight know that the arc of history has been a turbulent one. The transition from each of these kingdoms to another was violent. As one was raised up, another rises to tear it apart so that it can be on top. This has been the pattern among rulers throughout history. I don't think there's ever been a time without war on earth. History is littered with war and oppression. We don't live in a world where we can depend upon man to bring about utopia.

No one really knows for sure what kingdoms the four beasts represent because it is not mentioned directly, but here is one common thought. God starts with what Daniel knows and continues to what he doesn't know. The first beast represents the Babylonian Empire, that much Daniel knows. This kind of makes sense knowing what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. He was a cruel and powerful man, like a lion, and then he was given the mind of a beast and his skin became like the feathers of an eagle. (v4:33) The image of the wings being torn off and him being lifted up and given the mind of a man connects with Nebuchadnezzar. The second beast represents the Medo-Persian Empire. The reason it is raised up on one side is because the Medo side of the empire was so much bigger than the Persian side. The third beast represents the Greek Empire. Just as a Leopard was fast, the Greeks were swift in battle. And as the Leopard has four heads in the dream, the Greek Empire would be ravaged by civil war after Alexander the Great's death and divided among his four top generals. And the fourth beast represents the Roman Empire. Actually, we don't even know what kind of beast it is except that it is very powerful and terrifying. It is different than the other beast, made of iron and bronze with ten horns and destroys everything in its path.

If this vision is all that we have and we're told, "the world is a terrible place and it's going to continue to be a terrible place and we're going to go from one violent kingdom to another violent kingdom, over and over again and that is all we have to hope for, God bless you have a nice day." What a terrible message that would be! But thankfully that's not the end of it. Take a look at verses 9-10. "As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. **10** A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened." In the midst of all the violence, suddenly Daniel sees this awesome throne that is set above all the other kingdoms and on this throne, sits the Ancient of Days. This is a picture of the Creator God sitting enthroned as a judge above all the

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other kingdoms. Notice that God doesn't come out of the sea like the rest of the beasts. God is not down here competing with all the other beasts to eventually defeat them and then take his place as king of the mountain. Like the game I played with my kids. God's kingdom is not an earthly political kingdom. God's kingdom is a heavenly one that is above it all the others. It's eternal while the other kingdoms are temporal. God's bright white clothing and hair represents purity, holiness and righteousness. What do the other kingdoms have? They have war and violence. That's how they get things done. How does God get things done? With purity, holiness and righteousness. And the throne and everything around God was on fire, and the books were opened this represents judgment, that the accounts of men would be settled.

This is good news. These kingdoms come into this turbulent world and they wipe one another out and as you look on, you could look on in despair but we must remember that the Ancient of Days sits on his throne and he says, "Not only do I sit enthroned above all, but I will sit in judgement of how people conduct themselves and hold them accountable for what they do." Some people think that if someone doesn't enter into the covenant relationship with God, then we can't judge them according to the Bible. Somehow there are different rules for Christians and non-Christians because non-Christians didn't agree to live by God's rules. But in this chapter, we see everyone will be judged by God's standard and not their own. It doesn't matter if we are a Christian or not. Every man and nation is judged by the standard of Almighty God. There is no other standard. They will be judged by the standard of righteousness that comes from the Ancient of Days. Every individual and nation will be judged by the standard of purity and righteousness and be found wanting.

There is another picture here and it's beautiful. There is a sea of people who are worshiping and praising God. And it's beautiful because they come from all nations of every language. Once again this shows that God's kingdom is not a political kingdom, because it includes all people from all nations. The Ancient of Days doesn't compete with the kingdoms of the earth, he reigns over the kingdoms and his people come from within those kingdoms.

Verses 11-12 continue, "Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. 12 (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.)" In this vision, God destroys the fourth beast and yet he lets the others remain for some time and it made me wonder why.

Then the climax of Daniel's dream is displayed before his eye when the son of man comes. Take a look at verses 13-14. "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." This is the picture of Jesus. The son of man was Jesus' favorite reference for himself. He used it over 28 times in the book of Matthew. The son of

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man's arrival comes at the death of the fourth beast. He comes on the clouds of heaven. There is a great parade and procession as he enters. Then there is a great celebration as he is given all authority over the world. How was he given power and authority? According to Jesus, the Son of Man gave his life as a ransom (Matt 20:28), he was delivered into the hands of sinners (Matt 26:45), and he will be raised from the dead (Matt 17:9). He now sits at the right hand of God (Matt 26:64), and he has the authority to forgive sins (Matt 9:9). When he comes again he will separate the sheep from the goats, giving an eternal inheritance to those on his right, but telling those on his left to depart (Matt 25:31-46). Jesus is the son of man and he is the eternal king, who's dominion will last forever. He will give the sons of men who honor him an eternal inheritance and they will reign and rule forever with him. Our ruler is the Son of Man, the Son of God, the man Jesus Christ. Worship him!

Then we get a picture of the saints, take a look at verse 18, "But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever.'" Those who believe in Jesus will receive God's kingdom and possess it forever. It is pretty unbelievable so it's repeated… yes, for ever and ever. We don't have to worry, evil people may do their best to try to hurt us, but they can never take away God's kingdom from us.

And then there are verses 19-20. ""Then I wanted to know the meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws—the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. **20** I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell—the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully." This is something that many people want to know. What is the meaning of the ten horns? Who are they? When will they come? Actually, when I first started to study the Bible, the reason I started was because I wanted to know about the end times, the last days. It seems like I'm not alone.

Where is our attention supposed to go? to the Ancient of Days and the son of man and to the kingdom that will never end. We don't have to know who those other beasts or horns are, all we need to know is that they are examples of men that come and go. They are violent and ungodly but we live for the kingdom that has no end.

What is important is in verses 21-25. "I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell—the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. **21** As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them, **22** until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. **23** "He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. **24** The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three

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kings. **25** He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time." This is the progression of men until the son of man comes.

The conclusion of the interpretation is in verses 26-28. "'But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. **27** Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.' **28** "This is the end of the matter. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself.""

What's startling about this chapter is that when it's over, Daniel doesn't go away shouting for joy, but he was deeply troubled and alarmed, so much so that he turned pale. What this means is that great persecution is coming for the saints from the little horn and he will wage war against them and he will win. He will try to change God's plan about the end. But the scary part is that the saints will be delivered to him. And here we see the saying, "a time, times and half a time" this is 3.5 is a broken 7, meaning incomplete, something that is not brought to completion because if it had, the saints would have been completely wiped out, but they are not. The good news is we belong to the kingdom that will never end, but the bad news is that the beasts hate us because of it. The good news is that we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, but the bad news is that the worlds hates us because we belong to him.

So, what should we take away from this passage? 1. All the kingdoms of the world are temporary, including ours. This might shock some of you but America will come and go. America is just another beast. 2. The kingdoms of this world will always war against the saints, because we are not like them. 3. Persecution of God's people will ebb and flow until the end when it intensifies. 4. God will not forsake his people, but will deliver them and give them his everlasting kingdom. So, in the meantime here is what we do, we serve just like Daniel did. We acknowledge that kingdoms come and they go and this is the one we happen to be part of now. And it's better because of our presence. So, serve like you believe that. Live like you believe that. Witness like you believe that. Even though this kingdom is a beast, it is better because of our presence. So be present in it. Be active in it. Be influential in it. Be what God called you to be in the midst of this kingdom and God will be with you.

And by the way, isn't Daniel a good example of this? Was Daniel a Babylonian? No, but he served Babylon, and he served Babylon proudly. In fact, he served Babylon so well he was made second in charge. Was Daniel a Mede or Persian? Nope. But he served Medo-Persia with all his heart. There were Medes or Persians who didn't serve their nation as well as Daniel did and they tried to kill him for it. He was one of the thousands upon thousands that worshipped God. God's people also serve God no matter what political kingdom they reside in. In fact, all of God's have dual citizenship. We work for both God's kingdom AND our earthly kingdom – not just one or the other but both. God blessed Daniel and the kingdoms he served. If Daniel served the Babylonians,

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certainly we can serve America. But don’t get confused, while your service is a blessing to the beast, it won’t make the beast be anything other than a beast. So, don’t expect what you can only receive from your eternal kingdom from your temporal one. Hold your head up and look up to the Ancient of Days who sits enthroned above it all. Look up to the son of man who has all authority power and dominion and serve like you belong to God’s kingdom.

That means we should love God and love his people. If we devour and destroy, then all we are going to produce are those who devour and destroy. Where do we find people who are not like violent beasts? We find them around the throne of the Ancient of Days, they are those who worship God.

This week we saw the shooting in Las Vegas. What a senseless tragedy. Also, lately North Korea has making a lot of noise launching missiles and making nuclear threats. Then yesterday I saw on the news Trump gathered all the military leaders at the white house. He said this is the calm before the storm. When asked by reporters what does he mean, he said you’ll find out. This makes the whole world shake. We are living in an upside world, where wrong is considered right and right is wrong. Sometimes it’s hard to know what’s Right in the Upside Down. Although one beast after another may arise, only Jesus seems to be right because Jesus is our source of salvation in an upside down world. We should learn from this passage that the best place for us to be is around the throne of God because that is where we will find those who love God and try to follow him in righteousness. I pray that God may bless you.

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