

A vision that inspires



hope and courageous living

Note to home readers: Bishop Charlie is visiting us this Sunday, 8th August. As some will be unable to attend the service, nor watch the live stream, this message has been provided for your reflection.

Main Point: Transfiguration Sunday

Why did Jesus give Peter, James and John an experience of seeing him glorified? Peter tells us it was to reassure the believers who had not seen Jesus, that the prophetic message preached by the apostles was from God, and therefore can be trusted and relied upon – until it explodes in our heart and bursts forth in our lives.

For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendour with our own eyes¹⁷ when he received honour and glory from God the Father. The voice from the majestic glory of God said to him, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."

¹⁸ We ourselves heard that voice from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ Because of that experience, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets. You must pay close attention to what they wrote, for their words are like a lamp shining in a dark place—until the Day dawns, and Christ the Morning Star shines in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:16-19)

Intro | Today we begin a series on the book of Daniel – a series which I have entitled 'Courage in Times of Trouble'. Rather than focussing on the Gospel passage of the transfiguration of Jesus, we will delve into a vision or dream which Daniel received more than 500 years before – a vision which formed the background to what Peter and John saw. This same vision had such a profound effect on Peter and John, they spoke of it as evidence of the surety and reliability of God's word.

But first a word about the book of Daniel.

The book of Daniel divides neatly into two parts. The first six chapters are biography, telling the story of Daniel's deportation to Babylon and his adventures in the courts of various pagan kings. Again and again we see him standing firm under pressure, facing danger and death, and in the end being promoted by God to ever-higher positions of power.

When we come to chapter 7, the book changes from biography to prophecy. Prophecy is a divine revelation of foretelling the future of the Kingdom of God. The last six chapters detail four visions given to Daniel in the last 20 years of his life. These visions centre around the nations and empires of the world, especially as they relate to God's plan for Israel.

The first and greatest of these visions is found in Daniel 7. One theologian, named John Walvoord, calls this vision the most comprehensive Old Testament prophecy of the future. In fact, many of the Jewish scribes considered it the greatest chapter of the Old Testament. And the gospel writers quoted from it on many occasions.

Point 1 | Daniel's vision: Worldly kingdoms are like violent beasts which arise from the sea of humanity

When we read this vision, we need to keep in mind that like dreams today, God communicates with Daniel in a symbolic, pictorial form. Thankfully, because Daniel was gifted in understand dreams and visions, we have access to its meaning.

Today's vision concentrates on the dream Daniel had in the first year of Belshazzar's reign (around about 556BC). Let's summarize what Daniel saw.

As Daniel lay on his bed, he had a dream and then visions came to him during his dream. He saw the four winds of heaven whipping up the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Then without warning four beasts emerged from the sea, one after another.

First came a lion with wings. Then a ferocious bear raised up on one side. Then a leopard with four wings and four heads. Then an unidentified beast more terrible than the first three. The fourth beast had iron claws and ten horns on its head.

As Daniel watched, an 11th horn came up from among the ten horns and conquered three of them. Then the "little horn" began to boast of its power and to blaspheme God. At that moment thrones appeared, and the Ancient of Days (a term for God) came to judge the world.

The little horn and the fourth beast were destroyed and cast into burning flames. Then Daniel saw the Son of Man (a term referring to the Messiah, and so recognized by both Jewish and Christian expositors) coming in power and glory to set up his kingdom on the earth.

Let me put it in even shorter form:

What does all this talk about beasts and horns mean?

This dream relates closely with King Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Chapter 2.

An angel tells Daniel that the four beasts represent four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever (Daniel 7:17-18).

The "sea" Daniel saw was really the "sea" of humanity, the churning, rolling tumult of people and nations and politics and armies, as first one group and then another vies for power. Out of that chaos four kingdoms emerge (visually symbolized by the four beasts) one after another.

Each of these symbolizing an arrogant kingdom.

And last of all is a super beast identified as a really evil empire and it has lots of horns -- a common symbol for kings in the Old Testament.

And there's one specific horn who is an image of an arrogant king who exalts himself above God and persecutes God's people.

Then, a figure called the "Son of Man" appears "coming with the clouds of heaven". The Son of Man is an image for both God's covenant people but also for their King from the line of David. (Remember, how Jesus called himself the "Son of Man"? He got this terminology from Daniel's vision).

Point 2 | Despite all these powerful, beastly rulers, God: The Ancient of Days comes to set up his own throne, exalting the Son of Man.

But then all of a sudden, God, who is called the Ancient of Days, comes and He sets up His throne. He destroys the super beast and He exalts the Son of Man on the clouds where he comes up to sit at God's right hand and share in God's rule over the nations.

We can look back now and see how all of these stories in the first half fit together.

In the last days (which, incidentally, we are living in now) there will be a "fifth kingdom"— the kingdom of God on the earth, which will be fully established when the Lord Jesus Christ returns in power and great glory.

Now it is beginning to make more sense for us.

Point 3 | The stories and visions from Daniel are designed to inspire faithful hope when God's people live amongst corrupt and powerful rulers.

All the stories and the visions in the book of Daniel are designed to inspire faithfulness despite the mounting persecution that surrounds. They offer hope to God's people suffering among the nations. God's people suffer because human kingdoms have rebelled against God and become beasts. It's a pattern that is repeated over and over again - humanity and its kingdoms become violent beasts when they glorify their own power, when they redefine right and wrong and don't acknowledge God is their true king.

How are we to understand all these strange visions?

It is not difficult for us to spiritually discern the similarity between evil rulers of the past, who govern with violence and brutality, have the same characteristics as beasts. World leaders like Hitler, Stalin, Putin and the like, who have shown such brutality towards those under their control, bringing terror and fear to reign in the world. So, at a very minimum, these visions encourage God's people to be patient, waiting for God to bring his kingdom and rule over our world and vindicate his suffering people.

Application | However, we live on the other side of these visions.

Daniel looked forward to when the Son of Man would come. The Son of Man, who is Jesus, has come. While Jesus laid his glory aside, taking upon human flesh, he remains the glorious figure who Peter, James and John saw on the mount of transfiguration.

We know, that the Son of Man has already triumphed over the enemy of fear and death.

We read in Colossians that Jesus disarmed the powers and authorities, and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Colossians 2:15).

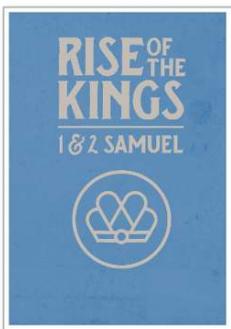
Jesus then brought us into his Kingdom and told us that because we are 'in him' we have authority over all the evil works of the enemy. We'll learn more about this as we read Ephesians chapter 6. So, while the devil and his workers are certainly roaming the earth, seeking to create havoc amongst God's people, Jesus has ultimately defeated them.

By looking at the life of Daniel (and his friends), we learn how we are called to walk courageously during these troubling times.

Next week we'll look at the familiar story of Daniel's frightful night in the lion's den. (PS: Before we discount this story as having no relevance for our daily lives, let us remember that we know the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking who he may devour (1 Peter 5:8) – perhaps you are already aware that there are some lions prowling around you.

Then, we'll launch in Daniel chapter 9, where Daniel sees a promise of God in the Scriptures that is yet to be fulfilled and decides to pray it into fulfilment.

Let us learn from Daniel, to be a people in whom the light of God dwells, filled with hope – knowing that our glorious King reigns, and his kingdom shall have no end.



OT Devotional: The Rise of the Kings | Final week

We come to an end of our devotion which journeyed through 1 and 2 Samuel. Let me know how you enjoyed it. How did this story point to Jesus?

Ephesians Devotional | Final Week

This week our Ephesians Devotional also draws to a close, with studying the final chapters. I look forward to hearing how your journey through Ephesians has nurtured your life.

