

Scripture Reading: Daniel 2:

“Now in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him. 2 Then the king gave the command to call the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. 3 And the king said to them, “I have had a dream, and my spirit is anxious to know the dream.” 4 Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic, “O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation.” 5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, “My decision is firm: if you do not make known the dream to me, and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made an ash heap. 6 However, if you tell the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts, rewards, and great honor. Therefore tell me the dream and its interpretation.” 7 They answered again and said, “Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will give its interpretation.” 8 The king answered and said, “I know for certain that you would gain time, because you see that my decision is firm: 9 if you do not make known the dream to me, there is only one decree for you! For you have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the time has changed. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can give me its interpretation.” 10 The Chaldeans answered the king, and said, “There is not a man on earth who can tell the king’s matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. 11 It is a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.” 12 For this reason the king was angry and very furious, and gave the command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. 13 So the decree went out, and they began killing the wise men; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them.”

"God's Mysterious Ways"

It is time for my next topical sermon here in Ordinary Time, but I am not going to ask what week it is: Having put Easter & Good Friday on our September calendar I think I have lost all credibility when it comes to calendars.

On a serious note, back in July I used a single verse on the value of work to help us learn about meditating on the Scriptures. Last month I turned to a tax collector’s story as an example of how the lives of people included in various Scripture accounts can help us live our Christian lives.

Two weeks ago, Deonte used Daniel as just such an example inspiring me to broaden things a bit today & consider how the Bible gives us great vision, or the big picture, what the world today likes to call the meta-narrative. I will do so from one of my favorite chapters in the Bible, and yes I think we can have favorite chapters, as long as we don’t skip over the ones we are not quite sure about yet in our devotional time. I hope we can use chapter 2 of Daniel to teach us two important lessons:

The first portion that I read tells of a King and his dream [*a dream that likely REALLY troubled him because in his pride he did not need Daniel to tell him that he was at least the head of Gold & perhaps the whole statue & what happened to it would have greatly troubled him!*]

However, I think his approach, even as a pagan king, gives us a lesson for when we encounter skeptics who seem to find hope and meaning in all the wrong places. This is important because the 2nd & major lesson of this chapter is to give Daniel and all of us great hope about where God is taking history!

Narratives are everywhere today:

From the story of one’s own personal journey to so-called mega-narratives that attempt to explain the meaning of all things.

- Of course as Christians we know that the only true grand narrative is God’s story of creation, fall and redemption!**

It is sad, but almost comical, how the Hollywood and media elites make fun of what they see as the shallowness of Christians while all the time borrowing the great themes of God's magnificent story to use in their own productions! The secular world has their work cut out for them when trying to come up with a better story, but they do try:

- **The biggest problem they have is trying to explain the complexity of the universe, the wonder of man, & the question of evil without God:**

The famous atheist Richard Dawkins gave it his best effort at a recent 'discussion' about the origins of man at Oxford University: He postulated that the laws of physics, working through evolution, had produced a terrific illusion of design which fooled all of humanity until the middle of the 19th century!

- **THAT is quite a leap of faith!**

Those who try to think of a world without God, have produced a mega-narrative that is very different from God's story. IF you go to secular schools or follow secular media, here is basically what you are going to be told, over & over: The Greek and Roman Empires were the Golden age, where man began to evolve into a glorious intellectual state. Sadly, in their view, these important advancements were overrun by Christians and other barbarians!

- **Thus the world was cast into a long period of decline they shamefully call the dark ages.**

After almost a thousand years, the Renaissance brought a revival of knowledge and learning and this in turn led to the Enlightenment where man found all the answers... Like that grand illusion of design ☺

And of course we now live in the modern age! A modern age that includes a great deal of despair because this mega-narrative provides no real answers to the pressing questions of life!

However, we do need to understand how powerful their use of language is: Terms like "golden age" "Renaissance" "Enlightenment" and "modern" are all a part of their mega-narrative.

"Barbarians" "dark ages" "ignorance" and "old-fashioned" are the contrasting language used for what they dismiss as the 'religious' alternative. This is no accident and our covenant children, as well as all of us, must not only be aware of what is being done...

- **BUT we must be ready & willing to share God's story: Ready & willing to give an answer for the faith!**

AND God's grand narrative is much broader than 'Jesus loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,' although that is certainly true for those who are His! At the center of God's story we have Jesus coming to earth two thousand years ago and here we can certainly agree that Rome ran the known world at this point of history... There are many who even speculate that this is why Jesus came at this particular time when there was a common language as well as Roman security and Roman roads which allowed the Gospel to spread around the known world.

- **What we can know is that Roman rule was not a surprise to God!**

It was part of His story, but certainly in quite a different way from how Rome is seen in the world's story.

Let's take a moment to consider how our God viewed this so-called 'golden age.'

Since God is the master story teller, it should not surprise us that He provides a very powerful & memorable picture of this time. It comes from my favorite chapter in the Book of Daniel, so let us dig in and hear that story and learn about how to engage those skeptics!

- **In the portion I read, we saw the King calling his wise men before him & giving them a challenge that is a GOOD example of how we should confront our modern 'wise men' like Richard Dawkins!**

6 However, if you tell the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts, rewards, and great honor.”

- **A challenge we should give to modern evolutionists: Tell us where everything came from, why man is special and why there is evil in the world. And no borrowing from us!**

These wise men had the same dilemma as our enlightened moderns: The tough questions need input from God to answer properly and they both refuse to let Him into the discussion!

- **Those wise men said, tell us the dream, and we can interpret it, but they could not tell the King what his dream was!**
- **Our moderns demand morality, but cannot explain where such a standard would come from and we should not let them skip that part.**

Now we sort of left Daniel in a precarious place, so let me continue on in our text from Daniel 2: “14 Then with counsel and wisdom Daniel answered Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon; 15 he answered and said to Arioch the king’s captain, “Why is the decree from the king so urgent?” Then Arioch made the decision known to Daniel.

16 So Daniel went in and asked the king to give him time, that he might tell the king the interpretation.” Daniel then returns to his house and tells his friends so they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.”

- **Daniel appeals to God, and God answers by giving him both the dream AND the interpretation: Something only God could give!**
- **Daniel does not run off to tell the King but rather first gives God all the glory, as we read at verse 19:**

“Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven. 20 Daniel answered and said:

"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His. 21 And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise & knowledge to those who have understanding. 22 He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, And light dwells with Him. 23 "I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, And have now made known to me what we asked of You, For You have made known to us the king's demand."

- **We must understand this as true not just with a single dream here revealed to Daniel, but also for all the great questions of life and lest we forget, no need for visions or dreams because it is all right here between two pages!**
- **The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord and those who reject Him are left as fools.**

Daniel is taken to the King who wants to know if he has the answers:

- **In telling the dream and its interpretation, Daniel shows how God uses these great empires AND clearly where the world is going in our time as well!**
- **But first, Daniel again gives God all the credit and glory!**

27 “Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, "The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king. 28 But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these:”

- **Daniel proceeds to give the King what no man could know without revelation from God...**

29 “As for you, O king, thoughts came to your mind while on your bed, about what would come to pass after this; and He who reveals secrets has made known to you what will be. [*God is revealing true history!*] 30 But as for me, this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but for our sakes who make known the interpretation to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart. [*encourage the kids to listen carefully*]

31 "You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. [*there is a proper use of that word!*]

32 This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron & partly of clay. 34 You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, & broke them in pieces. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain & filled the whole earth. 36 "This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king.”

I want to pause here for just a moment before we go to our major lesson about the right vision of history, and remind us again about the limits of human knowledge and understanding: Daniel has now shared all the details of the dream, but at this point could any of those magicians, astrologers, or sorcerers; or even the King himself have provided the right interpretation of the dream? Not even close, and that is why the King was wise to insist that the one to offer an interpretation first be able to tell him the content of the dream! Otherwise they could tell him any interpretation they want to make up.

- As Daniel pointed out it can be interpreted only by God, just as only God has the answers to the BIG questions that secular evolutionists simply cannot answer in our modern world, though they claim to be the experts!

So Daniel continues: 36 "This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. 37 You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; 38 and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold.”

- God, speaking through Daniel, has anchored this interpretation in REAL history! And the interpretation continues to track with real history.

39 “But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; [*Persian Empire*] then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth [*Alexander the Great & the Greek Empire*] 40 And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. [*an apt description of the great Roman Caesars & Rome’s so-called ‘golden age’ which was in reality an age of war and cruelty*] 41 Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. 42 And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile.”

- By the 1st Century the Roman Empire was in turmoil and contained various administrative regions or districts: A divided Kingdom.
- Again we see that Daniel’s interpretation is right on the mark.

44 “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”

- Leaving no doubt about where this is in history, Jesus began His earthly ministry by telling the Jews, ““Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
- Are we to think that Jesus ushered in a coming age of darkness?
- Are we to understand that the Roman ‘golden age’ was only lost until it could be found again in the Renaissance?

The answers should be obvious for any Saint because those great empires have been left as the chaff Daniel saw in the dream? In fact, I could argue that one only need compare some of those grand cathedrals built in what they called the Dark ages with the ruins that remain of Rome.

I don’t want to belabor this, but perhaps the arrogance we see around us today deserves it: We can even consider what the secular historians call the seven ancient wonders of the world. They are presented as reminders of the very grand kingdoms of men that Daniel saw passing on into the dustbin of history: One was the Hanging Gardens of Babylon: These gardens and the mighty Empire of Babylon as long gone. Next we have the Mausoleum of Ha-lee-car-nas-sus built to honor the leader of the Persian empire that conquered Babylon! Continuing down through history there are two more wonders that relate to the Greek Empire which conquered the Persians: The Colossus at Rhodes and the Lighthouse at Alexandria. 3 Both mighty in their day which followed Alexander the Great, but alas neither he, nor these grand structures or his Kingdom are with us today. Rounding out the list from the Roman Empire are grand statue of Zeus, the chief god of the Romans and the mighty Temple of Diana in Ephesus. However, these grand statues were destroyed by mere men! I hope that you noticed that this follows the great image pictured in the King’s dream and explained by Daniel:

- An image with a head of Gold which was Babylon, a chest of silver as the Persians, thighs of bronze for the Greeks & finally the iron legs of the Romans until the time that Jesus would come to establish His Kingdom.

As a side note, the only remaining wonder is the great Pyramids in Egypt. ➤ Perhaps it is a stark reminder for those with eyes to see that the only one still standing is a tomb!

- The Pharaohs & their kingdom are long gone, but Jesus, the stone cut without hands, rose again and today reigns on high.

- Those seven wonders serve to remind us of empires that have been crushed by the King of Kings still vainly trying to resist the foreordained march of history!

- Daniel assures the King that God has revealed true truth to Him, including real history, just as He has today in His Word for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear!

45 “Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold--the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.”

- We must learn to embrace this in the same way that Daniel challenged the King: “The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.”

The Spirit of God filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus was the theme of my series of sermons through Luke & Acts! There we learned in part how the Apostle Paul could at the end preach the Kingdom with no one hindering him as a Roman captive, because He KNEW their divided kingdom would soon join those other pagan empires of men in the dust bin of history. He also knew that the destruction of Jerusalem was imminent and that going forward the Kingdom of Jesus would fill the earth until His return!

- Was it hard for him to believe?

- I am sure it was at times!
- It is easy to let the circumstances we see around us to muddle the vision God has given His people.
- Sadly, we live in a nation where the Christians often lead the way in the school of pessimism, what I like to call the game of one-down-men-ship.

Such should not be the case and we can do better by trusting the promises that God has given...

- We are to know God's story and we are to tell God's story!

And while it might have been difficult for Paul to present such a grand picture of history as a Roman captive, it should be SO much easier for us who can not only know the same promises that the Apostle had, but can also look back on almost two thousand years of advancing Christendom!

- So just how does God go about filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus some might ask?

Pastor Courthial gives this encouraging challenge for us to consider, which mirrors what Pastor Leithart shares in the book Pastor Liberati has us studying:

“The Lord reigns, and from on High He acts on earth. But, paradoxically, He generally begins His works from below, beginning from the diversity of small communities –

beginning with the family, the local church, professional or cultural undertakings that are faithful to Him, that hear and follow His moral law, revealed in the Scripture, from small seeds sometimes spring forth great trees. We are not to be like Revolutionaries, who look to the day when they can take the reins of power in order to impose their top-down agenda. Rather like the Reformers, we are to be humbly sowing, humbly planting, influencing from below, patient & steadfast in our hope. This is our time: This is The New Day of Small Beginnings.

Our hymn of response this morning is one that quickly became one of my personal favorites: God Moves in a Mysterious Way...

- Something that the Apostle Paul would often have pondered during his ministry
- And especially in these final years of Roman captivity.

I think the hymn writer has captured how we should reflect upon the truth of Daniel's interpretation of the King's dream:

“Deep in unfathomable mines of never failing skill, He treasures up His bright designs and works His sovereign will!” Blind unbelief is sure to err And scan His work in vain; God is His own interpreter, And He will make it plain.

- Let us arise to boldly sing this hymn of faith, and pray that God will also make ALL these things plain to us!

Communion Meditation: Psalm 36:

7 “ How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!

Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.

8 They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house,

And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.

9 For with You is the fountain of life;

In Your light we see light.”