

The Son of Man on the Throne Forever

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[0 : 00] Afternoon Bible talk. Please stick around at the end. That looks like there's plenty of tea and coffee and food left. And so you'd be very welcome to spend some time talking and sharing in that together.

We're going to continue looking at Daniel chapter 7 this week. So if you'd like to turn with me in a Bible to that chapter, if you've got one of our church Bibles, which I think most of you do, you can find that on page 744.

That's 744. And just like last week, we'll read the first 18 verses of the chapter again.

Okay, so Daniel chapter 7, verses 1 to 18. In the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed.

Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. Daniel declared, I saw in my vision by night and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea.

[1 : 08] And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. The first was like a lion and had eagle's wings. Then as I looked, its wings were plucked off and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man.

And the mind of a man was given to it. And behold, another beast, a second one like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth.

And it was told, arise, devour much flesh. After this, I looked and behold, another like a leopard with four wings of a bird on its back.

And the beast had four heads and dominion was given to it. After this, I saw in the night visions and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong.

It had great iron teeth. It devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it. And it had ten horns.

[2 : 15] I considered the horns and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth speaking great things.

As I looked, thrones were placed. And the ancient of days took his seat. His clothing was white as snow and the hair of his head like pure wool.

His throne was fiery flames. Its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him. A thousand thousand served him and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.

The court sat in judgment and the books were opened. I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking.

And as I looked, the beast was killed and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

[3 : 26] I saw in the night visions. 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 people's 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. As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious and the visions of my head alarmed me. I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this.

So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.

Now, as we come back to this passage, to this momentous chapter in the book of Daniel, we need to remember that this is a vision that God has given to his people whilst they are exiles, while they're waiting for salvation to come and they're living in a foreign land.

[4 : 49] Those people need to understand the world that they had to live in for now. And they needed to understand it in God's way. And so here he lifts the curtain on reality and shows them what's going on behind the scenes.

Now, in many ways, we're in a similar position today. We are people waiting for salvation to finally come. And we're facing a lot of things that are hard to understand, that are hard to live through. We face difficulty now. Last week, we looked at the first part of this passage, where Daniel sees four beasts, each one representing an earthly kingdom.

And these beasts rampage across the world. They shed blood wherever they can. They were warlike and chaotic. All of them wanted to rule the world, or at least to rule as much of it as possible in a constant struggle for dominion and for power.

And we saw that the fourth beast, the fourth one that Daniel sees, was worst of all. And he mixed the usual bloodthirsty violence with explicit blasphemy against God.

[5 : 58] Remember, there was that little horn representing an individual, particularly terrible king, who was making great claims for himself against the throne of God, setting itself up to take over God's throne forever.

And so we saw last week that in this age, whilst we wait, all of us ought to expect difficulty.

No matter who you are, you are likely to get caught in the crossfire of this battle of beasts for the world. So we need to get our expectations right. Being a Christian is not going to keep us from normal suffering now, because this is what the world is like whilst we wait.

It's difficult. That's quite a bleak picture. And so we have to ask the question, is there, in fact, any hope? In the midst of that, is there any news, anything we can know to give us sanity in our suffering, to keep us going through the difficulty that we have to face?

The pattern now is suffering and hardship. But will that pattern last forever? Is there hope? Or is history just doomed to repeat itself over and over and over again, as some philosophers suggest?

[7 : 15] Should we join in with the Stoics and just accept that we can't control everything, grit our teeth and make the very best of it? Or is there actually something that we can look forward to in all of this darkness and difficulty?

What's the honest way to face the future? With hope and sanity or with despair? Well, mercifully for us, in these verses, God shares the secret of history with us.

We get a roadmap of history that helps us to do just that, to keep sane as we suffer. Not only do we see present chaos in this vision, but we see future glory as well.

And so we're able to read a vision like this, and we're able to walk away knowing where everything is actually headed in the end. So we're reading through this vision.

And we come to verse 9. And we come across what feels like quite a sudden change of scene. Perhaps it's like in a TV show. There's a sudden scene change, and the words appear on the screen.

[8 : 18] Meanwhile, across town, or meanwhile, in the next town. Scene 1, these beasts, focuses on the earth, where there are rampaging kingdoms all over it. They're warring, they're shedding blood, they're striding across the plains of the earth, crushing, destroying, and making great pompous claims about themselves.

But then we get to verse 9, and scene 2 suddenly focuses on another realm altogether. We read on, and we lift our eyes to the heavens. We've been looking at the earth, seeing the beasts, but now we're looking up to another realm.

So meanwhile, in the heavenly realms, thrones are being placed. And we see the terror and the rampage on the earth, the mess, the confusion, the war, the difficulty, is really not the only thing that's going on.

We get a glimpse into God's throne room. Well, what does it mean that thrones are being placed? Well, whilst the beasts are trampling, the divine council is gathering and getting ready to judge what they see going on on the earth.

The divine court, as it were, is in session. And so we're invited to ask the question, what is going to be done about everything that we've just seen that's happening on the earth?

[9 : 42] And as these thrones are placed, we're introduced to another figure, the Ancient of Days. It's a glorious title. It fills us with excitement.

And it's a title used for God himself. Notice how God is described here in verse 9. The title itself, Ancient of Days, shows us something important about him, as does the exceedingly white hair that he has.

It speaks of his great age, his agelessness. Before anything else was, this one was. And the whiteness of his hair and clothes is an image that shows us just how holy and righteous this one is. There's no stain in him at all. It's clear that this Ancient of Days is first and foremost in every way. He is first in authority.

He is first in righteousness. And he stands far above everything and everyone else in reality. When we glimpse something like this, it seems remarkable that these earthly beasts and kingdoms have forgotten, or seemingly forgotten, that this Ancient of Days exists far above them.

[11 : 06] Perhaps that juxtaposition is supposed to give us a bit of sense of how absurd that is. These beasts charge around in chaos and fury, scrapping over what turns out to be a very small piece of territory in the end, when the ruler and the source of all is sat, ready to give judgment.

Notice that in these verses, there's a lot of fire imagery as well. God's throne is fiery, and it has fiery wheels. Fire also pours forth from the throne.

And that just serves to further emphasize what these thrones have been placed for, what this council has gathered together for. Fire is often a picture of judgment and purifying.

And that fire surrounds the great Lord of the cosmos here as he sits to make a decision on the kingdoms of the world. And so it's clear. And so it's clear. This is a God who is sitting for judgment and whose condemnation will come with furious wrath.

And notice this figure's majesty as well. Daniel sees tens of thousands upon tens of thousands of attendants gladly serving this Ancient of Days.

[12 : 27] All of them hanging on his every word, waiting, just waiting to hear what he has to say. It's simply impossible to imagine, to picture that many people.

This is a picture of majesty and splendor. It's quite the contrast to the terrifying, but ultimately petty beasts that are squabbling over the spoils of the earth in the first scene.

And so the court gathers together and it sits in judgment. Notice in verse 10, the books are opened. Perhaps these books record the actions of the beasts on the earth, or perhaps they're opened to record the judgment that's about to be given for all of time.

Which way is it going to go? Have any of these beasts, these kingdoms, proven themselves to be mighty enough or worthy enough to be presented before this throne and stand?

Can any of them receive the dominion that they've been fighting over? Because that is what is about to be judged. That's what a decision is about to be made on.

[13 : 39] This reality is something that I think many world leaders would do well to remember more often. They may have a throne, but there is always a higher throne that will judge them in the end.

Pick any world leader, any powerful nation or powerful organization. The ones who throw their weight around to get what they want. Well, they ought to remember this.

That there is an ancient of days, someone far greater who sits on a throne far greater above all other reality. And one day, every single one of them will come before this throne to be judged.

That's also a reality that we would all do well to remember as we go about our daily business. There is a higher throne than the ones we see and the ones that we'd like to imagine that we sit on ourselves.

And the ancient of days that sits on that higher throne will judge. That's sobering, but it's something we really ought to remember. In verse 11, we briefly change scene again, just for a moment.

[14 : 57] It's a quick glance back to what's happening on the earth, because that little horn, that great king on the fourth beast is still trampling the earth and it's still making a big deal of itself.

In the face of the throne of the ancient of days that we've just seen, I think it's starting to look a little bit pathetic. It's starting to look like a small child demanding attention when something much more important is going on.

But nevertheless, it's making a loud noise and demanding that it be heard. And so we know, don't we, that this great beast's judgment must be coming close.

Perhaps we wonder it will be a great clash, a climactic battle between God and his enemies. Is it? Well, no.

Look at verse 11. In fact, it's incredibly anticlimactic. And I think it's anticlimactically purposely. Look at how quickly the beast's fortunes turn.

[16:01] One moment it's strolling around, making grand claims about itself. And the next moment, it has been killed. There's no struggle or anything here.

There's no great battle. The beast dies and is handed over to be burnt until there's nothing left of it. Now remember, from the perspective of those on the earth, this beast did indeed look mighty and dreadful.

But in the face of God, in the face of this ancient of days, the Lord of everything, it ends up defeated with a measly whimper.

I think that's something that's going to prove immensely comforting to us. If we ever find ourselves in a situation where the powers of darkness, where the powers of the world seem utterly insurmountable.

If a time comes when the full weight of this world's governments come down on us, this will prove comforting. Perhaps that's something, perhaps it's much easier to understand the full-bodied strength of this comfort if you've faced something like that before.

[17:13] If you're someone who's lost family to war or treasured property has been taken from you out of greed or out of negligence. Or perhaps if someone you love has been arrested wrongfully and unjustly and they're never seen again, as happens in so many parts of the world every day.

Or perhaps it's easier to understand the comfort of this when your family has been torn apart by someone behaving selfishly, horrendously, sinfully, tearing everything that you hold dear apart. Imagine that in those situations, it feels as if the great powers of the world are stacked against you. And as much as you shake your fists, as much as you go through the courts to find justice, as much as you appeal to the authorities, nothing seems to be able to shift the behemoth of the earthly kingdom, the great power that is against you.

But let's look again here. Here, the mightiest earthly kingdom strolls around, pompously claiming all might and splendor and power for himself. But in the end, the Ancient of Days judges him and snuffs him out in a sentence.

And in verse 12, all the other beasts mentioned in the first part of the vision lose their dominion as well. They also claimed to be something. But in the end, the judge has found them just as lacking and has taken away even the little power that they thought they had.

[18:52] It's hard to say what it means here by the other beasts' lives being prolonged. But no matter what that means, the vision is very clear about one thing.

It is only for a season and a time that it's life, that their lives are prolonged. So that means that their lives aren't prolonged forever. God has decided that they will end.

And so they'll only exist for a definite and limited amount of time. The end has been decided. And it will come when the Ancient of Days says so.

All earthly kingdoms have a best before date. Their end is written in God's books. It is decided.

Every country might strain as hard as it can to last forever. But God has already decided when it will end. That's the same for the UK, for China, for Russia, for America, for any country, any power you can imagine.

[19:54] Their end has already been decided. No matter what they do. Surely this judgment reinforces what we were thinking about last week.

If these beasts and these kingdoms, these earthly powers, are where you put your trust, then you really need to find something better. Why exhaust your life serving these kingdoms?

Hoping against all the evidence that they'll come out on top in the end. That something lasting will be fashioned from them, by them. Their end is already decided.

And it will come at the hand of the Ancient of Days at the moment he's decided whether you rage against it or not. There is no hope to be found in these kingdoms.

Surely there's something better. Dominion does not ultimately belong to these beasts, to these kingdoms that we see around us. It is not theirs to keep.

[20:56] All beasts are judged in the end. But that still leaves the throne of the world unoccupied. So who is going to rule over the earth and its people?

And we'll notice here that the court is still in session. Who will the Ancient of Days give that throne to? And that's the question that draws us once again into the throne room of God in verse 13.

Daniel looks and approaching the throne of God is another figure. Just like the beasts, this figure is coming to the Ancient of Days to receive his verdict.

He is described as like a son of man. This one is human. Really human. Not beastly, like everyone who's claimed the throne before.

But he's also coming to the throne on the clouds of heaven. That's a curious phrase. Remember, the beasts appeared not on the clouds of heaven, but from the depths of the sea.

[22 : 01] Meaning they came from the realms of everything that opposes God and stands against him. But we should notice the contrast here. This son of man is coming from an entirely different realm.

He's coming from the divine glory of God himself. So these clouds suggest that this human son of man is more than that. That he's from the realm of God.

That he's also divine. What will happen when this one is presented before the throne of the Ancient of Days? We've seen what judgment the Ancient of Days gave on the previous claimants on the throne.

What will happen when this one comes? We'll look at verse 14. This son of man receives the throne that all the kingdoms of the world have been fighting over.

They were never worthy. They never could have been worthy. They could never stand in the judgment of God. But this one that comes now is worthy.

[23 : 02] This man is finally the one that God has chosen to give all dominion and all authority to. And look at the result of that in verse 14.

The son of man receives the service of every person, every nation, and every language. Instead of condemnation, he receives glory and power.

Dominion is his and is his forever. And so unlike the turmoil of violence that accompanied the battle of the beasts, the son of man's kingdom will never, ever be destroyed.

At last, there is stability and peace and someone worthy to rule the world at last.

And so this, this is the ultimate end of history, the goal described here in Daniel 7. This is where every event, big or small, significant or insignificant, is heading.

[24 : 17] These verses here describe the great culmination, the great climax of the thundering flow of time and space. A human and yet divine man being judged as worthy to receive the throne of the earth for all time and being given it by the ancient of days.

This is colossal news for Daniel, who sees this vision firsthand. Surely this is more overwhelming for him than anything he's ever seen before.

But once it's sunk in, what a comfort it must have been for him and for the rest of God's people.

They're waiting in a world that is violent and hard and confusing, and it seems to go on forever.

But now they know for sure that there is an end coming. An end where their king, someone who belongs to their God, is on the throne forever.

What colossal news for Daniel to hear. But we, we have seen more than what Daniel has seen. A few hundred years after Daniel saw this vision, a man appeared in Galilee.

[25 : 37] And he started to say things about himself, which sound quite familiar when we've read Daniel 7. He said things like this, which we can read in Mark 14. He's talking, the high priest is passing judgment on him.

And the priest says to him, are you the Christ, the son of the blessed? And Jesus responded saying, I am. And you will see the son of man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven.

Ring any bells? It should. This is just one example of the many things Jesus said, claiming to be this son of man explicitly and openly.

Jesus is this figure from Daniel 7. He is the perfect divine man who would receive the throne of the world forever. When I, when I first read this passage, my initial thought might be the same as some of yours was.

I assume that this here is speaking about Jesus's return to rule at the end of time. But I'm not sure that's quite true, or at least I'm not sure it's the complete truth.

[26 : 46] Notice something quite important here in Daniel 7. The son of man isn't coming from the throne of God, but is being presented to the throne of God. So I think what we have here fits more closely with what we traditionally call the ascension of Jesus after his resurrection.

When he left the earth to go back to his father. We often have a habit of neglecting that part of Jesus's life, his ascension. But I think here it's quite important because the moment of Jesus's ascension is when what is described here at least starts to happen.

Jesus returned to the throne of God then, not just to put his feet up and have a rest. He wasn't just going home at the end of a hard day's work. In his ascension, Jesus was being presented to the ancient of days as the son of man and was declared worthy to receive the throne of the world forever and ever.

And that is where Jesus is sat now and will sit forever. And so this, in fact, is the end and goal of history described here in Daniel 7.

This is where every event is heading. This is the great culmination. It's Jesus Christ. A real human being sat on the throne of the world forever and ever ruling all things.

[28 : 15] Now, if Jesus is that son of man described here, I don't think we can avoid saying what Jesus himself said about this sort of passage.

As we've just read, in the final hours before his death, when Jesus was faced with all the opposition of a world that hated him, Jesus's response was the one we read from Mark's gospel. He said, you will see the son of man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven. And essentially what Jesus is saying is, I am this son of man. You oppose me now and you hand me over to die. But this is not the last time you will see me. And when you see me again, it will not be comfortable at all.

And so I think we need to say the same thing today. If this is who Jesus is, the one who is sat as king of the earth forever, and you oppose him or you think little of him, then what on earth do you think you're doing?

Christ has taken the throne already. This moment is already underway. So please, for your sake, if you're not with him now, get on his side.

[29 : 30] You can see in this very passage the fury of God against his enemies. Remember the fiery throne, the destruction of the beasts, the utter destruction of the beasts.

There is a window of mercy for now, but not forever. So turn to Jesus Christ while you have a chance. Turn to the king and trust him. History is his.

The throne is his. And the world is his forever. So you be his as well, willingly now, before it's too late.

As we read in the book of Hebrews, Christ is on the throne. And he is still waiting for all his enemies to be put under his feet. But he won't wait forever. If you think little of Jesus Christ, let this vision open your eyes and let it bend your knees and bow before him.

But if you are a Christian, then let this comfort you as it surely would have comforted Daniel. We might be surrounded by kings and powers that claim great things about themselves.

[30 : 42] But even now, they aren't really on the throne. Not forever. Jesus Christ already is. He's the one in charge.

And one day soon, though it doesn't feel soon whilst we're living in this world, one day soon, we also will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of glory. And he will be coming to claim visibly what he already has, what has been given to him forever.

That news is not going to prevent suffering in this age. As long as these beasts roam around and cause trouble, there will be difficulty. But that news might just keep us sane whilst we wait.

It might keep us going till the end. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for this momentous vision that you gave to Daniel first and now to us.

Lord, we confess there's so much here still that we don't understand. And there's so much that confuses us. But Lord, we thank you for what you have shown clearly. That every difficulty we live through, every struggle we face will come to an end one day.

[32 : 00] When our King who is on the throne comes to claim what is his. So please, Lord, help us to submit to Jesus. To obey him.

And to live as people who know that he is our great King. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.