

He is Coming

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Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn now to the Bible into our reading this evening, two readings in fact. First of all, in the Old Testament, in the prophet Daniel, and then in the very last book of the New Testament, the Revelation of John.

Daniel comes after the long prophet Ezekiel, if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles, it's page 744, Daniel chapter 7, and then Revelation is on page 1028 in our church Bibles.

It's the very last book of the Bible, and we're going to read a few verses from Revelation chapter 1. So first of all, then, Daniel chapter 7, reading the first 14 verses of Daniel's great vision.

In the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay on 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, and four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another.

[1 : 1 6] The first was like a lion and had eagle's wings. And 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 other beasts that went before it, and it had ten horns. 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.

[2 : 2 9] 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 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 beast, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season at a time. I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man.

[3 : 3 7] 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 peoples, 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.

Would you turn now to the book of Revelation, and we pick up John's words in Revelation chapter 1 at verse 1.

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the word of this prophecy. And blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it. For the time is near. John, to the seven churches that are in Asia, grace to you, and peace from him who is, and was, and who is to come.

[4 : 56] And from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings on earth.

To him who loves us, and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom of priests, to his God and Father. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.

And all tribes of the earth shall wail on account of him. Even so, amen. Amen. Amen. I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.

Amen. And may God bless to us this, his word. Amen. Amen. Now if we have our Bibles open, first please, at the book of Daniel, on page 744.

[6 : 16] And we'll have a moment's prayer as we're looking this up. Let's pray. Lord God, as we contemplate the wonder of the word made flesh, as we bow at the manger, as we ponder the great mystery that God was manifest in the flesh.

Open our eyes, Lord. Lord, we pray that you will open our eyes to see what you are saying to us in the scripture. That you will cause our hearts to burn.

And that you will send us out into the world with this glorious message of a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And we pray this in his name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.

[8 : 13] Amen.

Amen.

Amen.

Amen.

Amen.

[10 : 43] Amen.

Amen.

Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. between God and his adversary, between the creator and the prince of this world.

[12 : 43] And when the prince of glory came the first time, Herod tried to kill him. Remember in Matthew chapter 2, why do the nations rage?

Long ago, David has said, the kings of the earth take counsel together against the Lord and his anointed. So these beasts are the solid reality of human power in time and space.

The ferocity of the lion and the bear and the swiftness of the eagle and the leopard, the bestiality of the fourth beast. Human power is ruthless.

Human power is unforgiving. Human power is very real. But also, and the Bible does this, it's not an entirely bleak picture.

Verse 4, the end of verse 4, the mind of a man was given to it. Human power also has good things about it. There are intellectual advances.

[13 : 40] There are cultural, scientific, medical advances. So the nature of human power is that it rises out of the sea. It's the Holy Spirit is at work, not just in the church, but in the world.

And there is this great clash in this fallen, broken world. And that's why this fallen, broken world still has good things in it. There are times and places where people live in comfort and in peace.

There are times and places where people enjoy human power. But also, what Daniel is showing us is the nature of God's power. Verse 9, thrones were placed and the ancient of days took his seat.

Now, notice, this isn't a chronological sequence. It's not that these things happen and then after that, the thrones are placed and God sits on it.

This is a parallel reality. The throne of God is towering above these regimes, these power-hungry regimes as they arise.

[14 : 42] And these regimes exist only by permission. Verse 12, as for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away. But their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And in the present day, these powers rule by God's permission. And the other thing is we look at verse 13 and 14. The one who will reign, and notice first of all the end of verse 14, everlasting dominion who shall not pass away into his kingdom, one that will not be destroyed. Notice the threefold repetition there. This kingdom is going to last. And the one who rules this kingdom is not a monstrous animal that rises out of the sea. This is the one who comes from heaven. The one, a son of man, came in the clouds of heaven. This is the last Adam. The one who took our flesh. [15:41] Fullness of God in helpless babe. This is the one who is coming in the clouds of heaven. And he comes to God the Father. Now let me make a point here.

Notice he doesn't come from the ancient of days. He comes to the ancient of days. This is not referring to his coming again, which we looked for. This is referring to the ascension. When his work on earth completed, he ascended into heaven. Read the last few verses of Luke's gospel and the first few verses of Acts. His work on earth complete. He ascends to heaven. That's a very important point. Because in a moment or two, look at Revelation. The Revelation passage does refer to his coming, which is yet future.

Important thing is this. The two comings belong together. The first coming, when he came as a helpless babe, when he lived on earth, when he died, when he rose again. [16:40] This points forward, as I say, to his second coming. The two comings belong together. All the great saving events. So if you mention one, you're implying the other.

That's the important thing. Just as the apostles do in their preaching, the apostles regularly preach the resurrection. In fact, if you read some of the sermons, you could imagine they didn't talk about the cross at all.

But obviously they did. When they talked about the resurrection, they talked about it as God's vindication of what had happened on the cross. So here, as Daniel looks into the future, he sees that this one who comes, the Son of Man, the Lord from heaven, will ascend into heaven, his work on earth completed.

He comes to God the Father, and basically God the Father accepts him. The ascension, remember, is so important. If the ascension hadn't happened, how would we have known that God accepted the sacrifice?

So that's the first thing then. When he comes, he will deal with human power. Remember, he did that even the first time. Human power was marginalized. Human power was shown not to be all it was supposed to be.

[17:53] Read Luke chapter 3. You have a roll call of the good and the great, those who were around on earth at the time. Augustus, Caesar, Pontius, Pilate, Annas and Caiaphas, the high priest, all the good and the great.

Well, the great anyway, when they were good, it's quite another matter. And then, Luke says, and the word of God came to John the Baptist in the desert. And what was that word?

He is here. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now, if we turn over to Revelation, now, it's on page 1028. What else has his coming?

What else do both his comings do? And the second thing is that his coming, his first coming, means that our sins can be forgiven.

And his second coming means that that will be, as it were, underwritten. And shown to be true. Verse 8. Sorry, not verse 8.

[18:53] The end of verse 5. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood. Once again, not a full exposition of this passage, but picking up one or two of the points.

Christ, the first word and the last word. Christ coming in the middle of time and to come again at the end of time. And notice in verse 1, the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.

And then in verse 3, the time is near. 2,000 years have gone. How can the time be near? How can it be soon? Now, we've got to remember, Revelation, like Daniel is writing this apocalyptic language. Soon and near means that it is certain of happening. There is no possibility of it not happening. But more importantly, it means that every generation must live as if they might be the generation who are alive when the coming takes place.

No one in this building knows when he will come again. No one anywhere knows when he will come again. And that's why Jesus himself says, be you ready for in such a time as you don't imagine, the Son of Man will come.

[20 : 19] He may come in the lifetime of some of the people in this building. He may not come for hundreds of years. But the point is, in apocalyptic terms, it's certain. And of course, you remember what the psalm says, a day with God.

This is a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. And all on God's purposes are all involved in this.

Verse 4. Grace and peace to you from him who was and who is and who is to come. God the Father. That's a paraphrase of the divine name Yahweh, Jehovah of the Old Testament.

The one who was and is and is to come. And from the seven spirits who are before his throne.

Once again, I think that's a poetic way of talking about the Holy Spirit and the fullness of his power.

In apocalyptic writing, seven is the number of completeness. Coming ultimately, of course, from the days of creation, the seventh day when God completed his work. And so it is from the seven spirits and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness.

[21 : 22] In other words, the whole Trinity will bring this about. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together to bring about the plan of salvation. The Jesus who died and rose again is the one who forgives our sins.

Now notice two things about this phrase at the end of verse 5. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins. To him who loves us, that is an eternal fact.

Never was a time when God did not love us. Of the Father's love begotten, ere the worlds began to be. And Peter speaks of the Lamb foreknown before the foundation of the world.

And someone said, and I don't know who said this, but wherever there was a sinner on earth, there was a Savior in heaven. Jesus did not simply become the Savior.

Savior right from all eternity. Remember, after the fall, God did not introduce plan 1B. God had this plan of salvation, the redemption, the forgiveness of sins from all eternity.

[22 : 29] That's the glorious wonder of the gospel. And that's the wonder of Christmas. They don't divorce it from the rest of the gospel. But also, this eternal fact is expressed in time and space.

To him who loves us, present tense, and has freed us. A specific act in a specific time and specific place.

Round about AD 30, he suffered under Pontius Pilate, as the creeds say. He freed us from our sins and made us a kingdom.

That's going right back to the Old Testament and including all the people of God. Because that's what the book of Exodus says. Israel was created as a kingdom, as a nation of priests.

This is wonderful. And right at the very beginning of the story, Gabriel says to Mary, You will call his name Jesus Joshua the Savior.

[23 : 29] That is who he is. That is the essence of what he came to do. And Simeon and Dana later on in that story, Hail him as their promised redeemer.

Simeon says, Now let your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation. Don't divorce Christmas and Easter.

Don't divorce Bethlehem and Calvary. Don't divorce the part. Because remember, if one part falls out of the big story, the whole story falls apart.

Pull out a thread and the garment unravels. Pull out a brick and the building collapses. So, he comes to set up his kingdom. And that kingdom is going to be populated by forgiven sinners.

Remember, God has never set aside his purpose. God's original purpose was that humanity would rule the earth. And the glory is that that will happen in the new creation.

[24 : 27] For given, redeemed sinners who are like Christ will rule the earth. And the third thing is his coming will bring history to a conclusion. I am, verse 8, the Alpha and the Omega.

The Alpha and the Omega don't just mean the beginning and the ending, but everything in between. Here's the whole story. This book is called The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

It's of some importance. We don't call it The Revelations of Jesus Christ. It's not primarily a timetable of events. It's primarily the unveiling of the person who is at the heart of these events.

The one who was and is and is to come. And then looking at verse 7. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye shall see him.

First thing there is there will be a universal judgment. This is to be described graphically in chapter 20, the judgment of the great white throne.

[25 : 33] The middle part of Revelation talks about the judgments in history, the way in which God is always judging throughout history. Revelation 20 is the judgment on history, when history is rolled up and when the final judgment comes.

Now, that's not an eccentric idea. It simply comes at the end of the Bible. That's an idea rooted in the whole of the Bible. Psalm 98, rejoice before the Lord because he comes.

And why are we to rejoice? Because he comes to judge the earth. That's coming back to our first point. When he comes, the rivers will clap their hands. The mountains will rejoice.

The whole of the landscape will be transformed. It will not be a thaw, as the dwarf says in the line, the witch and the wards. It will be the spring. Aslan is on the move.

That's what will happen. The whole of creation will be transformed. That is why we rejoice at his judgment. Remember what Paul says in Acts 17. God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.

[26 : 42] He's given assurance to this because he has raised the judge from the dead. The earth gave him no welcome. No shelter. No home. He slept in a stable.

The inn had no room. That's what we sang a few moments ago. We also sang, didn't we, Soon comes God's morning. All glorious with song. Then earth shall not see him rejected again.

Triumphant in glory. Her king comes to reign. There is something absolutely right, isn't there? That the king who was rejected, despised and rejected, will reign in the place where he was despised and rejected, in the new creation, the new heaven and the new earth.

There will be a universal judgment. And that judgment will involve both blessing and cursing. Those who pierced him.

Even those who pierced him. Those who, as we'll sing a moment, those who sat at naught and sold him, fized and nailed him to the tree.

[27 : 48] This will be the terrifying moment when they realize that the one they rejected is their judge. But the second thing I'd want to point out is that his people will be eternally with him.

Because this is developed later on in the book, particularly the end of the book, in the splendid imagery of the new creation. Notice, as I said, he comes with the clouds of heaven.

He doesn't come out of the sea, the abode of the dark powers. And Paul has already said this in 1 Corinthians 15. As we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will bear the image of the man of heaven.

We can't help bearing the image of the man of dust, Adam. Because we are born into this world, into this fallen world. And because of that, we grow old, we are ill, we suffer, and eventually we will die.

But we will bear the image of the man of heaven. And that's how Revelation puts it. At the end of the book, his servants will serve him, and they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

[28 : 58] Contrast, obviously, to the mark of the beast earlier in the book. So you see, the Christ who will come again at the end of time is the Christ who came to Bethlehem.

The child who is born, the son who is given, the wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the prince of peace. Whether we go to be with him through death, or whether we are alive when he returns, this is the Christ whose birth at Bethlehem we celebrate now at the beginning of Advent.

This is the Christ who died and rose again. This is the Christ we worship and meet in his word and around his table. It is this Christ and no other who will come again.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Let's pray. Almighty God, give us grace to cast off the works of darkness and to put on the armor of light here in the time of this mortal life when our Savior came to visit us in great humility so that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may be made like him in his eternal kingdom where he lives and reigns with you and with the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.