

Kingdoms Rise, Kingdoms Fall Pt. 2

March 28, 2021

Daniel 2:31-49

On this Palm Sunday, we find ourselves studying Daniel's interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2. Now, for those who weren't with us last week, this in itself sets our minds spinning. Why are we talking about Daniel's interpretation of a dream on Palm Sunday? What do the two have to do with each other? And the answer is that we are a people who systematically study the Scriptures, and we happen to be studying the book of the prophet Daniel right now. And in God's timing, this is where we are at in our study. In laying out the sequence of sermons, I chose this year not to break the study of Daniel until Good Friday and Easter Sunday. But little did I know how directly the two would be linked. You see the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel chapter 2 has EVERYTHING to do with Palm Sunday. The two are directly linked. In fact, I wish I had planned to preach a Palm Sunday message from Daniel 2. It would have been a good plan.

You see the direct connection in the wording of v. 44, "And in the days of those kings (the Roman kings, the 4th kingdom) the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed..." There it is! In the days of the worldwide rule of the Roman kings, the God of heaven would set up His kingdom, which we rightfully know as the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, terms taken directly out of Daniel 2. And on Palm Sunday, we celebrate the day when the people of God joined together to welcome their incoming, conquering king, Jesus. The King has come, salvation has come, long live the King! That is what Palm Sunday is all about, and it refers directly back to Daniel 2, the very passage before us.

So, hear the word of the Lord concerning the setting up of His kingdom, as recorded in Daniel 2:31-49. Again, it is a long passage, but know that we will focus our study starting at v.44 and the announcement of the coming of the kingdom of God. READ Daniel 2:31-49.

Main point: The Kingdom of God has been set up under the king of God's choosing to crush all other human kingdoms.

The coming of king Jesus was accurately described in Daniel 2 some 600 years before it happened. And there were people living in Jesus' day that knew it, longed for it, looked for it, were waiting to celebrate the day of its coming...even if they did not fully comprehend what this kingdom would look like. Like Joseph of Arimathea in Mark 15:43, "Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was himself looking for the Kingdom of God..." There it is, Daniel 2! And lest we look down on them for their lack of perspective, I think we today are doing the same. We too do not fully comprehend what the Kingdom of God is like. We should, but we do not. Perhaps we can use this occasion to correct our short sighted perspective! (2 parts)

I. The kingdom of God is very different from and very superior to all human kingdoms. vv. 44-45

The text presents clues that ought to have guided the thinking of those who later would read this passage. I think specifically of those in Jesus' day who were "waiting for the kingdom of God." And yet, I think we too often do the same. We fail to comprehend the "other world" nature of the kingdom of God.

v.44- And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever,

As I've suggested, "in the days of those kings" seems to me clearly pointing us to the days of the Roman kings. That is the context of this statement. It surely fits and would be appropriate that it mentions plural kings. The truth is that there was a succession of kings, the Caesars. But again I remind you that this was written about 600 BC, well before there was much of a Roman force of any significance. Yet, here we see that during their heyday, God was going to do something world changing.

He would “set up a kingdom.” He would establish a kingdom. He would form a kingdom. I think the wording is important. He is not going to form an army and declare war on the current kingdoms. No, He was going to set up a kingdom among kingdoms. This is what Jesus said in Luke 17:20-21, “Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, 21 nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” It is a different type of kingdom.

Can you see the point? These Pharisees had understanding that the kingdom of God was coming. But they wanted to know when it was coming and how they would recognize it. So, the expectation was there. What was missing was an understanding of what type of kingdom would be this kingdom of God. And Jesus’ answer was that it would not look like other kingdoms. It would exist and grow around them, among them. It is not like all of the human kingdoms which expand by conquering and deposing. The kingdom of God would set up shop within cultures, while human governments were going about their normal business. It would be possible to have such human governments and the kingdom of God flourishing in the same place and time.

We see this dynamic play out during Jesus’ crucifixion scene and in fact throughout His ministry. He was viewed as a threat to the human structures around Him, like the Jewish king, or Roman rulers. But Jesus insisted that He was no threat at all. Caesar had no reason to fear an uprising among the people of the kingdom of God. The two could peacefully co-exist. It would be like a yeast, that is placed in a lump of dough and it slowly, surely takes over, affecting the whole loaf. It starts out small and inconspicuous, but over time exerts more and more influence. This is the way the kingdom of God was designed to work. It would start during the time of the 4th kingdom, the Roman kingdom.

In other words, the statue of Nebuchadnezzar had 4 layers, not 5. This fifth kingdom would not be like the others, not the same shape, not made of the same materials, not built on the same foundation. This kingdom of God would be of a different nature and quality.

Yes, it would conquer all other “human” kingdoms, but not in the usual way. When it conquered, it would not be through armies and weapons and battle plans as you might expect when it comes to war. No, it would infiltrate and permeate and cause to change from within. You could be in the midst of it growing and not even notice it. It is a different type of kingdom!

45 just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.”

Here we see that the King is a different type of king. He would not be a local hero who rises through the ranks or proves himself on the field of battle, or is born as the son of a current king (although it is significant that He is the Son of David!). No, He would be a stone cut out of the mountain by no human hand. He would be a different sort of king. The hand of God would be upon Him. His arrival on the scene would not be like other babies, not even babies born into royal families. He would be born of royal lineage and worshipped at His birth, yet born in the most humble of ways with rival kings already seeking to kill Him. He would gather a ragtag group of zealots, fishermen, outcasts and hotheads. He would grow a crowd of outcasts and invalids, of people who were spiritually oppressed rather than spiritual giants. And yet, like Daniel, it would be clear to anyone willing to look that the hand of the God of heaven would be upon Him. He would do things that no human could do, that only the gods could do. Yes, He was a king, but He was a completely different kind of king. We see that predicted here and lived out in Jesus.

II. Every king and kingdom ought to and eventually will bow to this King of kings and Lord of lords. vv. 46-49

King Nebuchadnezzar here does what ought to be done, even if it is a bit wrongly placed, a bit self-serving, and a bit short lived as we will see in the next passage. But the concept is correct and foretelling. There ought to be and will be someday a bowing down to the King of kings. Or, in the context of the celebration of Palm Sunday, there will come a day when His people will

welcome His arrival with “Hosanna, Save us!” knowing that He comes to smash His enemies under His feet and set up His kingdom as the everlasting kingdom! All WILL bow before Him!

46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him.

Again, King Nebuchadnezzar here confuses the true King with the King’s spokesman. I wouldn’t be too harsh with him. He does not have the framework that we have. He is just an egotistical dictator who thinks he is all that. But here, he has recognized that he is in the presence of one who is greater than he is. And so he bows, and does what he would probably do to his own god. This is what you do before the gods, you bow and declare your lack of value as compared to the one you are in front of (pay homage), and then you give of yourself in the form of pleasing offerings. So, Nebuchadnezzar has the right idea, even if his comprehension on who is the actual god here is wrong. We see in the next verse that it is perhaps not quite as bad as it seems.

47 The king answered and said to Daniel, “Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.”

The God of heaven, the God of Daniel and the Hebrew people is the supreme God, the God over all gods. He is the Lord or Master of all kings, He rules. He is the One God who has all knowledge and can reveal it as He chooses, the revealer of mysteries. He has proven His ability to know the unknowable. He knows the future like other people know the past. He can speak with authority about events hundreds, thousands of years in the future. He is worthy of all praise, honor, worship, homage, incense, and offerings. The winner of the battle of the gods is clear! It is Yahweh, God of the Hebrew people like Daniel.

48 Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. 49 Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach,

Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.

The king is true to his word. He showers Daniel with gifts, with honor, with titles and responsibilities. But I see more here. As we see with Joseph and Pharaoh, wise men of God are good people to have at the top of your organization. They are good men to have in charge. Men of integrity, men with wisdom, knowledge, without fear or guile, these are the men you want in charge. There will always be a need for such men, and so a smart king will take advantage when he finds one...even if the wise man is from one of your conquered nations. But we also notice the king puts him in charge of all the wise men advisors. He is not only the only truly wise man, he is now in charge of all of the other "wise men." They have to follow him, his lead. Can you see how all of this has been flipped around? They were the ones educating Daniel in all things Babylonian, but now he is their teacher. How do you think they will deal with that turn of events? I don't think we will have to wait long to find out!

And here, we also see that Daniel surrounds himself with those he trusts. He has been entrusted with a larger responsibility than one man can handle so he seeks and receives approval to appoint his trusted Hebrew friends as assistants, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So, the script has been flipped on the leadership of the Babylonian empire. The grand experiment in infusing the Babylonian culture and beliefs into the conquered Hebrew people has resulted with the Hebrew people being elevated to positions of power over the Babylonians. Oh, the irony!

But wait, isn't this just giving us a model of what the expansion of the kingdom looks like? The Hebrew people did not cause an uprising and storm the capitol and defeat King Nebuchadnezzar. They simply went about their lives and God raised them up in a way that was all His doing and they ruled in such a way that no one would have predicted. He showed His great power and wisdom through them in a way that was obvious. And He is not done yet, there will be more examples to come. The kingdom has been set up in Babylon and is expanding to unbelievable degrees...all without the raising of a weapon. Are you seeing the model?

So, I would like to pause and project forward to the days of Jesus. As I've suggested, it is no small thing that Jesus tailored His whole message around the concept of the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of heaven. If you looked up the word "kingdom" in the Bible, you would quickly see that the most usages of the word are in the books of Daniel, Matthew, and Luke, Daniel and the gospels. If we went through all of the references, we would be here until tomorrow. Just know that Jesus' message was all about the Kingdom of God. What did He say in the Lord's prayer? Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. So, for three years of ministry He presented His message in terms of the Kingdom.

And then we come to His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on this day, a week before His death and resurrection. On that day, the roadway into Jerusalem was lined with worshippers, falling before Him, paying Him homage, offering their coats as a roadbed. There were people coming out to greet Him, there were people following in His train. He was coming to conquer, but not as any other conqueror! He rode a beast of burden, not a white stallion or a chariot of iron. He came not with a huge army or the latest in weaponry. He came with Himself and devoted followers. That's all, but that's all He needed. He had the power of God. He would conquer from within, through acts of service that stood out to authorities.

On that day when Jesus came into Jerusalem, He was treated like the king that He was, by young and old, by those He had already rescued and by those He was about to rescue. And yes, His reception was short lived by too many. Yes, the people's confusion over the type of kingdom and King He would be led them to abandon Him, resulting in His crucifixion. But that too was part of the plan. That too was an act of war, a war that He would win decisively, a war against this world's most powerful enemy. He has won the war!

You see, the Kingdom He that day set in place has not, could not, will not be defeated, just as Daniel has here laid out! It has grown, is growing, will continue to grow until our King returns in great glory. Oh yes, there may be many, even kings who do not acknowledge that this kingdom even exists or certainly has

any power. But they will! Folks, our King has won, continues winning, will win over all. Hail King Jesus, Ruler over all!

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

1) We will read the words of Jesus with new emphasis on His teachings about the Kingdom.

2) We will see our identification with this kingdom as our primary identification.

3) We will expect this kingdom to advance and grow around us, in our lifetimes.

4) We will be ready to be used in ways no human could orchestrate.

5) We will live in a state of honor for our One True King Jesus.