

November 24, 2024 Daniel 7: 9, 10, 13, 14 "Dare to Be a Daniel"

Our text this morning from the seventh chapter of Daniel is a vision of the changeless God that transcends human time and place. This is where our church calendar ends this year, a fierce and terrible reckoning of human history. It is the vision with which the last book in the New Testament, Revelation, opens.

How wonderful and awesome is Daniel's vision of God taking his place on his throne to issue judgment on the earth. In the one like a human being, the church has seen Christ, to whom dominion, glory and kingship are given eternally.

This vision stands beyond human history and is a relief to hear. There will be justice on earth. The constantly changing waves of power and wealth will not trouble us any more.

What kind of person received this purifying vision? What is it we are teaching and nurturing in our children and young people, in the hopes that they, too, would have such an encounter with the living God? What kind of homes and conversations and lessons and examples will they be needing?

Based on the Old Testament cycle of annual festivals, our church calendar acknowledges the order and meaning within the daily, monthly and yearly movement of the earth and moon and sun. We have come to the last Sunday of the church year, Christ the King Sunday, where God reveals Godself within creation, God's immanence and presence, judgment and power. That is one aspect of God. God also lives and reveals Godself in eternity, an awesome and terrible and changeless God who lives beyond time and place.

Daniel's vision includes both God's involvement in human history and God's judgment standing outside history. He must have been raised right to see God so clearly! Right? Don't we want for our children what Daniel had?

Daniel was a member of the covenant community living before the time before Christ, but without temple, priest, daily or annual sacrifice to take away his sin and the sin of his people. Solomon's temple has been destroyed, anyone with leadership killed or dispersed, with only the poorest left to mark the place around Jerusalem that was the kingdom of Judah. Young Daniel was part of an educated or wealthy family and taken into exile in Babylon to be trained as a leader and a resource for the Babylonian empire.

Daniel's people and, presumably, his God, had been defeated. He was given the opportunity to make a name for himself by serving the Babylonian empire. What a dangerous experience for a gifted young person! "You're special. We want you to use your ambition to climb this ladder!"

Daniel was not a carefully protected Jewish youth prepared for leadership among his own people. We do not know how old he was when he was removed from his family and taken into exile. The court he was trained in was more sophisticated and powerful than what he had known in Judea. By God's grace, Daniel did know the life and glory of God and he went forward with that core identity.

Are we teaching the youth in our home and in our faith community to honor God because that is the dominant social and economic order? If that is so, will they easily adapt to whatever seems to be more advanced technology and greater economic power, while retaining benign sentimental memories of church?

Daniel didn't have to fight against becoming complacent in his faith, going along with the crowd at festivals. He had to choose at every step to honor God more than the favor of kings.

Before the kingdom of Judea was destroyed, God said through the northern prophet Amos, "I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me..." (Amos 5:21-24) The religious were shocked. "But you asked us to order our lives this way! How can you be angry at us?"

The simple beauty of daily and ritual seasonal life is meant to bring us into God's presence, but has nothing to do with our own righteousness. Like Job, we cannot justify ourselves before God. In a way beyond understanding, we are invited into God's presence, the pure and heavenly presence described by Daniel in our text, without negotiation or conditions.

Where do we expect leadership to come from for God's people? How do we ourselves expect to be shaped into faithful servants of God who can comfort and lead others? We have some idea of what our family life should be, disciplined in the kind of training provided by church communities, to train ourselves as adults and children and youth in Godliness and holiness?

This vision comes outside the borders of Israel, outside the annual cycle of festivals, outside the Day of Atonement, outside of the possibility of ritual cleansing by a priest. Daniel dares to see and speak of God, from outside all that has been commanded of Israel by God.

The book of Daniel is divided into two parts. In the first six chapters, there are six inspiring stories of people in exile threatened by unbelieving rulers. These people kept their faith in God and were delivered from death by the power of God. Chapters seven through twelve tip into an even more dire challenge. The unbelieving ruler is neither wise nor humane, but raw evil power challenging God Himself. It is in **that** impossible situation that Daniel has a vision of God that is like that of another exile, Moses, before the burning bush. Daniel's vision we read today, as well as the rest of his Writings, have shaped all subsequent understanding of God.

Daniel is thoroughly bilingual and bicultural. There are Aramaic words and phrases in other parts of our Scriptures (Ezra 4:8-6:18, 7:1-26 quoted sections; Jeremiah 10:11 one word; Genesis 31:47 2 words). Unique among the books of our canonical Bible, Daniel is about half Aramaic and half Hebrew, but not cleanly divided, say, between the first 6 chapter unit and the second 6 chapters. (Hebrew—1:1-2:4a, 8:1-12:13; Aramaic—2:4b-7:28) In the version of Daniel in the Roman Catholic canon, stories in Greek considered Deuterocanonical, of Susanna, of Bel and of the Dragon, are included.

In the Protestant canon, Daniel is lined up at the end of the Major Prophets after Ezekiel, and followed by the Twelve Minor Prophets. The Jewish canon includes Daniel with the Writings, considering the prophets closed with Malachi. Jewish writers refer to Daniel as a prophet as well as a wise and Godly man.

In the New Testament, Daniel is named in Matthew (24:15) in reference to the prophecy of the desolating sacrifice in the temple and the stories referred to in Hebrews (11:33b-34a). Jesus Christ takes the identity of the Son of Man (Mt. 24:30, 26:64; Mk 8:38, 13:26, 14:62; Lk 21:27). Only in Daniel in the Old Testament do we meet the Angel Gabriel (Dan 8:16, 9:21; Lk 1:19, 26) and the Angel Michael (Dan 10:13, 21, 12:1; Jude 9; Rev 12:7)

[Other themes of Daniel in the NT are the kingdom of God; the desolating sacrifice (Mt. 24:15, Mk 13:14 from Dan 11:31, 12:11); the evil one of the future (2 Thess 2:4; Dan 11:36); resurrection to judgment (Dan 12:2)]

This vision of a God of unutterable holiness and power came to a man who could not be ritually pure because there was no temple and priest and sacrifice, nor was he in the company of God's covenant people. Daniel was caught between two worlds and God revealed to him that God is Lord over all human kingdoms.

This is the position each of us live in, but we are not necessarily pushed to this extreme of isolation and danger, so that we are not necessarily aware of it.

If Daniel, then, can see and know Israel's God, why should we and our youth, living between two worlds, not also see God in this way? How can we bear witness to the God who transcends our immediate society, whose worship is deeper than prescribed rituals? Our children and young people are growing up in an uncertain and dangerous world. How can we expect and encourage them to learn to love and worship the Living God?

## **Resources**

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