

Daniel 7-13-14

“The Kingdom of God”

This passage from the book of Daniel may seem like an odd topic for the season of Advent. Advent is all about waiting for the coming Messiah so what does that have to do with Daniel’s apocalyptic vision of God sitting on God’s throne in judgment? Well, just this. Apocalyptic literature is written to folks who are in trouble: persecuted, and hard oppressed. The idea is if we know who is in charge, and if we know who wins in the end we will know how to respond when we are attacked for our faith. We will know how to behave around people who have very different beliefs from us. We will know our place when we face time of trouble. For these reasons the subtitle of this morning’s sermon is, “Whose kingdom is it anyway?”

Daniel is written during the time when Israel was in exile. There are more Jews living outside the Promised land than inside the Promised Land. They struggled with this question, “Does God still have dominion over us in foreign lands?” That sounds like an odd question for modern Christians who believe God is everywhere. However, for the Jews in this time and most other people in the Ancient Near East, their god’s only offer protection and only offer dominion in the lands their god’s have given to them. Now the Jews were scattered across Persia. Is God still in control? Israel was set up so that God would be their King above all kings, their God. Was God’s reign limited by geography? Can God still be in charge when the people around me don’t know God and will not serve God? You know. It is hard when you realize what you believe and what you value makes you different. Feeling like you’re the only one who believes can leave us wondering if God is really in charge. There’s this great line from the movie I-Robot, “Does thinking you’re the sane person left on the face of the earth make you crazy? Because if it does, then maybe I am.”

Into this struggle Daniel has these crazy visions and dreams. There are four beasts. One with 10 horns and one horn sprouts up, and starts bad mouthing everyone. The vision climaxes with one like the Ancient of Days sitting on a flaming throne with a river of fire coming down from the throne. Then one appears like the Son of Man, and to him is given dominion, glory and kingdom forever.

Daniel explains the beasts are the governments of that particular time and the kingdoms currently in charge of Palestine. When it’s all said and done, the Ancient One – the Lord God Almighty will be triumphant. Then God will set the one who is to rule forever. The bottom line message to all of the Jews is God sits on God’s throne. God is in charge. It does not matter where we are. It does not matter how many people around us believe in God. It does not matter how many people say they believe in God, but don’t work to grow closer to God. What matters is this. God is God. We are not. If we are all gonna claim Jesus as our savior, we have to bow the knee to Jesus Christ as our Lord. It does not matter where we are. It does not matter who we are around. God is God. Amen? **Amen.**

Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Amen?! **Amen!**

Amen.

I have served six churches in eight years of ministry. I was there when St. Timothy closed. I was there where Cotton Grove struggled with money. I was there when Wesley Heights struggled with bullies. The root problem in all three churches was this confusion, “Whose kingdom is it anyway? Whose church is it anyway?” When we allow other things to cloud our judgment we stop doing the work of being the hands and feet of Christ. We allow the broken in our midst to stop the birth of new ministries and to crush some fruitful old ministries. We stop managing our money well for God’s glory. We quit inviting people to church. Where is God in charge and over whom?

Read Daniel 7:13-14

Y'all may be tempted to think the preacher is getting really worked up this morning. Let me bring it home for ya. We're going to bring it home with a pop quiz. Church, when Jesus came out of his temptation in the wilderness what did Jesus proclaim? (pause) Come on now. (pause) If you don't know you better grab your pew Bible and look it up. (pause) I'll give you a hint. It's around Matthew 3 and Mark 1. (pause) What does Jesus say?

“Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17).

“The kingdom of heaven is at hand; repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

The Kingdom of God is one of those things that's hard to explain because the Kingdom of God is almost, but not yet. When Jesus comes out of the wilderness and declares, “Repent!” Turn around. All y'all turn around, and come back to God it is because God is with them. What do we call Jesus when Jesus is born? (pause) We call Jesus Emmanuel, which means God with us. The kingdom of God is at hand when God is with us. However, Jesus did not come in his full power. Jesus is fully God and fully human, but if we cannot bear to look upon angels without falling on our faces in fear, how could the disciples have ever sat and learned from Jesus? Jesus did not come in Jesus' full power; hence, the kingdom of God was almost with us in the form of Jesus Christ, God with us, but not yet. There will come a time when Jesus will return in all of the glory, honor and power of God to judge the quick and the dead. But that day is not yet. In John's Gospel Jesus tells the disciples,

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away the Counselor will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7).

The Counselor is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God. And the Holy Spirit is with us always. The Holy Spirit is always calling and reaching out to us in good times and in bad. The Holy Spirit calls and enables us to turn back to God. The question for all of us this morning is how will we respond? Will we give the full tithe? (pause) Will we act upon the firmly held belief there is no retirement from ministry? (pause) Will we take ownership of the wrongs suffered in this world because we have not loved our neighbor as ourselves, and because we have ignored the cry of the needy? When hard times come will we content to sit and wallow, or will we self-medicate from the medicine cabinet of this world which only makes us more sick? When we see children who are going without, when we see people who are neglected, or discriminated against will we remember who is the King of kings? Will we pull up our grown up Christian pants? Will we get up off of our pews and serve the Lord? Church, if we really are members of the Kingdom of God, who is our King, and how will we respond to His lordship?

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen