

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
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John Crosby  
Jeremiah's Lament  
Daniel 7**

[Video.]

They wander away from You  
Yet always You pursue.  
Always Your power is displayed.  
Hearing Your voice above all others  
My reality no longer drives me.  
Your heart consumes me.  
Seeing the world with new eyes  
I cry out for justice.  
What others see not  
Has become an eyesore.  
I cannot shake them.  
But in isolation  
Your faithfulness is my companion.  
We must now turn aside from a dead religion  
To a living heart.  
Let Your salvation burn  
Through the thicket of our disobedience.  
Let your covenant, love,  
Make everything new  
So we may discover a life lived in peace.

And those are the prophets. They see life differently from everybody else who is walking around doing normal life. You bump into one of them and they are looking at and seeing the same world you see, but differently, and the encounter changes you.

We want to continue our series League of Their Own listening to the stories of the prophets, but I want to say a couple of things first. Last week my wife Laura preached on the prophet Nathan and she shared with you that it had been a tough month because her baby brother David was very sick with cancer. Laura and I spent most of the week in Chicago with David and he died on Friday about midnight. It was a good thing, the end of his suffering, but a hard thing as well and Laura thanks you for your prayers.

The prophets are people who see the world differently. Twenty-eight percent of the Bible is prophetic literature. That means that we don't read about 28 percent of the Bible. We don't

understand it. It is too weird. It's seemingly for a different time and age. I want to give you, in three images, the ability to understand the role of the prophets.

The first one is this. Everyone go like this with your arms. You're facing the front, looking at the whole front of the sanctuary and you see through your arms the organ and the cross and everything. Most of the time that's the way the prophets are living life. When you read the prophets' stories, they are looking at the same world you're looking at, only they are often seeing different things. They are seeing *the big picture*, but their life is the first part of the story. You see the same world but notice different things.

Now everybody go like this and look at the same wall through your hands, like you're looking through a window. You cannot see the whole wall, can you? You can only see parts of the wall. The prophets are given the ability by God to look through a window and maybe see *the near future*. They can't see all of what's happening, but they can maybe see the near future, often through dreams or visions. That's what many of the prophecies are about.

Everybody go like this, like you're looking through a peephole. You can't see anything else that's going on but you can see the cross very clearly. You focus on what you can see differently when you're looking like this because it's the only thing you can see. That's the gift of the prophets. God has given them a picture of *the end of the world*. They cannot see the whole thing. They can only see a little image of it, but what they see is filled with clarity and power and it changes their lives. That's the third image of the role of the prophet. When you are reading the books of the prophets, ask, which of these lenses am I seeing this through? Is this an event the prophet is living, or is it a dream where the prophet is looking at the near future, or is it a picture of the end of the world? I shouldn't expect to understand much of this tiny picture except to know that something big is going to change.

Let's look at Daniel. In some ways, Daniel is the king of the prophets. He is the last of the five major prophets. That just means that those five guys had long books. The other 12, the minor prophets, had short books. He is also late in time. That is, Daniel arises late in the season of the prophets. He is what is called a post-exile prophet. This is how Daniel's story starts.

<sup>1</sup>In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. <sup>2</sup>And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

<sup>3</sup>Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—<sup>4</sup>young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. <sup>5</sup>The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

<sup>6</sup>Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. <sup>7</sup>The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

This is what happens to the little empire of Israel. It is a very little country, a very little empire caught between huge empires, and when they wash on by, they take Israel along as if it is just an appetizer. Empires have done this several times in history and once they did it with Daniel. In one day Daniel lost his country. He lost his culture. He lost the relationships he cherished. He would have to learn a foreign language and he would have to live and die in a place he never wanted to go. He would never go home. He even lost his name and that's a big deal. The Hebrew names of each of the men in verse 6 had a reference to God into it, either the syllable *el*, Dani-el and Misha-el, referencing the El in Elohim, God, or the syllable *Yah*, Hanani-ah, and Azari-ah, referencing Yahweh, their name for God. Jewish names remind the Jews that they belong to God. The new names that Nebuchadnezzar gave them were his way of saying, "You have a new king now. Give yourself to me. Allow Babylon to define your identity. Find new gods. Your old god let you down."

The name Daniel literally means *the Lord will judge*. It's a great name. The Lord will be my judge. For his whole young life, every time Daniel heard his name, it was a reminder that the Lord will set things right. The Lord will see that justice is done. His name had a promise written right into it, but now he's not Daniel anymore. Who is he? God was not setting things right. Where is God? In fact, it looked like his whole promise was broken. What happens when you go to Babylon? What happens when your life doesn't turn out the way that you thought? You're in Babylon at a dead-end job or divorced or struggling with infertility or you have children who are breaking your heart. Or you are single or broke or deathly ill or in depression. You are in Babylon. Sometimes when you have all the success in the world, you wake up dissatisfied as if something is wrong with the world and you are right. There is something that is wrong with the world. You live in Babylon. What happens when life turns out differently from what you thought? What happens when you live in a culture far from the values of God? You are in Babylon.

Daniel never went home. Daniel lived for 50 years and served four different kings in two different empires. He pulls together all three of those views of a prophet we just learned. The big picture, just what he lived, how he lived, the dreams of the near future, and the periscope of the end of the world. Daniel can be seen as 12 chapters, but Daniel can also be seen as three dramas and three dreams and one destiny. The dramas are at the beginning. They are what we remember most about the story. The young men are drawn into Babylon. They are given the unclean junk food of the Babylonian Empire, but instead of sitting at the king's table and eating it, they say, "God told us not to eat like this. We can't eat this food. Please serve us vegetables and fruit." The official said, "I can't do that. The king will kill me if you're not flourishing." They begged, "Just let us eat God's diet from Israel for ten days and then compare our appearance with the young men who ate royal food." At the end of the ten days, they looked healthier and better nourished than the other young men. Drama no. 1.

Drama no. 2: they come to a place of power and the king sets up a huge idol in the province that everybody is supposed to worship. And everybody does except for three: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They don't do it and are thrown into the furnace, but they live.

Drama no. 3 is the story Dan Anderson told the kids. Out of jealousy, the legislators plan to trap Daniel. They pack into a long bill a little phrase that said that everybody had to pray to the king. Daniel opens his windows and prays to God three times a day like he has done all of his life and the king hears about it. According to the laws of the land, the king has no choice but to have him thrown to the lions. The door to the lions' den is sealed closed, but the lions start to pray with Daniel and Daniel lives. Three dramas to illustrate how to live a life far from home among people

with completely different values. This picture is supposed to give us courage to live in a different land. It is to remind you that you are not at home. You are living far from the values of the Kingdom of Heaven, but you are not to curse where you live. You are to learn how to bless where you live and how to thrive without becoming a Babylonian.

The three dreams are pictures of the near future. Three different times two different kings have a dream and they are terrified. The kings don't understand what the dreams mean and they want to kill all the people who say they have the gift of prophecy. Each time Daniel says, "Don't kill anybody. God has told me what is going to happen." The first dream, remember, was of this big statue. Daniel says, "God has told me, this represents the four kings who are to follow you and they will all crash because the foundation is just human." In the second dream there are a bunch of trees blowing but the roots are shallow. Daniel says, "This is your kingdom and as long as you are doing okay, it will do okay, but if you get too proud, it will all blow away."

The third dream, you guys might remember, is the time when the king is having a feast and all of a sudden on the front wall, writing appears, but nobody can read the message. They send for Daniel and he says, "I don't think I want to read this one." "I'll give you half of my kingdom if you tell me what this means." "No, I don't think so." "What does it mean?" "It means you are a liar. You are a cheater. You are going to die tomorrow." "About that half of the kingdom thing? I think I'll pass." He doesn't kill Daniel and the next day the emperor is killed.

These are the dreams that show that life as you and I see it is not always what is really happening. We read the stories of the dreams of Daniel to give us perspective that is eternal. You and I should go through this world with bifocals, focused intently on things like nuclear deals with Iran and at the same time confident that God has a different view. The futility of putting faith in the powers of the earth will leave us bitterly disappointed in the end. We are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. Dramas and dreams are what make up the first six chapters, the first half, of the Book of Daniel.

The whole second half is about destiny. It's the weird part that makes you not want to read the Book of Revelation because it's just too weird. These dreams are just strange dreams, but these last six chapters are visions of the conflict that will lead to the end of the world. They are there to give us hope in very trying times. Now everybody likes to know the future, right? To our shame, billions are spent on astrology and millions are spent on Ouija boards and palm readers. Everybody looks down on those people. How stupid can you be?

How many of you play the stock market not knowing what will happen? There are three quick scenes that will show you the end of the world in Daniel. They begin in chapter 7.

<sup>2</sup> In my vision that night, I, Daniel, saw a great storm churning the surface of a great sea, with strong winds blowing from every direction. <sup>3</sup> Then four huge beasts came up out of the water, each different from the others.

"The first one was like a lion," Daniel said, "eating the heart of a man. The second one was almost like a bear that eats all flesh. The third one was like a leopard who would rule us all and the fourth one I can't even describe. It had a little horn on top that mocked all of life and scared me." When you see the end of the world, you shouldn't expect it to make sense. It's symbolic language. You are trying to describe the indescribable. Why would you think it's understandable? And Daniel is speaking not primarily to the people who live in Babylon. He is

speaking to the children of faith in a language they would understand. So when he says, "I saw four creatures coming out of the sea," for them the sea was a symbol of chaos and death. This is a dangerous time, Daniel was saying in code. He said one looked like a bear and one looked like a leopard and one looked like, "I can't even tell."

We don't know what those creatures were but we're pretty sure that they were empires, other nations. We don't know which ones, but they did and the reason I know that they did is, what is the symbol of Russia? It is a bear. And the symbol of the United Kingdom is a lion and the symbol of the United States is an eagle. We would know that. People in China would be going, "I have no idea what they are talking about." That's what Daniel is doing. He is sending a message in code. We don't understand it because we don't have the code but what if they were reading this at a synagogue right next to a golf course here in Minneapolis and I said something like, "He strode the fairways like a tiger but fell into the woods and then I saw a new star rise over the Jordan"? What would I be talking about? Golf!

The pictures that are drawn are symbols, but they need to be taken with a sense of humility because we could be wrong. What Daniel is saying here is that coming out of the sea will be trouble. And from the Holocaust to Stalin to Pol Pot to children starving in North Korea to racial injustice in this country, there is trouble living among the nations. One of the reasons that the prophet is to speak is to say, "Expect trouble." The famous theologian Karl Barth was reading the Book of Daniel when he said that the purpose of God's Word to us is to comfort those who are afflicted. Help is on the way. And to afflict those who are comfortable. Judgment is on the way. And to ask each which word they will hear? Are you the afflicted who needs comfort or the comfortable who needs to be afflicted? That's where Daniel starts with his scene 1.

Scene 2 starts in verse 9. He said,

<sup>9</sup> "As I looked,

    "thrones were set in place,  
    and the Ancient of Days took his seat.  
His clothing was as white as snow;  
    the hair of his head was white like wool.  
His throne was flaming with fire,  
    and its wheels were all ablaze.

<sup>10</sup> A river of fire was flowing,  
    coming out from before him.  
Thousands upon thousands attended him;  
    ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.  
The court was seated,  
    and the books were opened.

<sup>11</sup> "Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire.

The second thing that Daniel sees is "When you think it can't get worse, see this. God is on his throne. All will be well." The second principle is that God's justice will come. And it is not meant to just be a word of comfort because every time it's said, it is said to people who are living in

Babylon, having to choose which side they are going to live on. “Are you going to continue being a stupid Jew believing God, who has let you down, or are you going to join the crowd and live like a good Babylonian?” Choose, but know that the God of judgment will come. Know that the God of judgment sees everything and knows all hearts. The second thing that Daniel wants to do with this is, he can’t even describe what God looks like, but he says that the Ancient of Days was purer than snow.

In my last year of seminary, one of my favorite professors was given tenure. That means he was set for life basically. They had a ceremony that was just rooted in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. All the faculty processed in their regalia and he looked like a cartoon figure himself. He had a hat to show his degree from the Sorbonne and a robe to show that he was from Oxford and an academic stole to show that his Ph.D. had been from Harvard. He walked up and right in front of him was his mentor, a famous theologian from Harvard. He knelt in front of his mentor who turned to us and said, “Let us pray.” It felt like God was in the house. And then his mentor said, “O thou Ancient of Days, fill the temple with fire and sit on your throne. O thou Pure as Snow, rest uncomfortably on this brother and never let his eyes not see your sight, thou King to come.” Forty years later I remember it almost word for word because somebody in the house said, “This is God.” The prophets, remember? God is not your copilot. Jesus is not your homie. The Ancient of Days. The last scene though is in verse 13 and it says that something happens approaching the throne.

<sup>13</sup> As my vision continued that night, I saw someone like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. <sup>14</sup> He was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed.

If the first scene showed that this world is filled with trouble and we are to be comforted, and the second scene showed God seated on his throne far away, the third scene showed that the answer to our weary world is not religion. It is not a secret handshake. It is not laws that keep the good people close and the bad people far away. The answer to this world can only be “Someone will come.” From the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus of Nazareth said that He is the Son of Man and everybody who had read the Book of Daniel said, “What?” because the Son of Man comes from the throne of God and goes back to the throne of God. Jesus said, “I saw the Son of Man descending on the clouds with authority and power to judge the world.” Jesus referred to Himself as one who had come to bring justice, the only one who could comfort the afflicted and give the comfortable justice, who would wipe every tear from every eye and the sea would be no more.

These are the prophets. They are not meant to leave you feeling, “Oh, that was a nice sermon, Pastor.” They are meant to shake you up. They are meant to shake you to life! The intent behind the prophets is not so you can study them like a manual and figure out the date when Jesus is coming back. The prophets spoke so that you would now live in Babylon differently, with courage and hope, because Jesus is coming back, bringing both judgment and life, life in all of its abundance. It does not mean your world changes all that much.

The famous evangelist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was D. L. Moody, the good Chicago boy. At the end of his career Moody was out in the garden and one of his students came out holding the Book of Revelation and said, “I think I understand it better now. It means that Jesus is coming. Dr.

Moody, what would you do if you discovered that Jesus is coming today?" And Moody replied, "Well, I would make sure that I was doing a very good job with these roses." You are not called to take your life and go and hide on a mountain. You are called to bring your life before God and say, "I live in Babylon. What is today's task?" And the King will lead you one step at a time.

Lord God, thank You for these sisters and brothers, who have been reminded today that as comfortable as this place is, and as much as we love our country, it is Babylon. We are far from the place where You are the King and what Your Word says goes. We are far from being the kind of people who wholeheartedly plunge without thought of consequence into following You every hour. I pray that Your Word will give us the confidence that Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had, to live without fear of consequence. I pray that the dreams that You give us of the near future will offer us the perspective that in this world, we will have trouble, but that You have overcome the world. I pray that these tantalizing little glimpses we get of the end of the world will remind us that You alone are the King and that Your justice will not tarry. You spent all that is in Your life to come and rescue those who cry out for the Name of Jesus Christ. Bless us, Lord. In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, we pray. Amen.

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