

And He Shall Reign Forever!

A sermon based on Daniel 7:13,14

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come...from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

I have this rule, which, I'll admit, my wife doesn't particularly care for, and that's: no Christmas music until after Thanksgiving. I don't have a great reason for that rule, I just prefer to give Thanksgiving its fair due before turning toward Christmas. Well, we're just a few days away from Thanksgiving, so I thought I'd bend my rule slightly and talk about Christmas music.

If you had to choose a piece of music that encapsulates Christmas for you, what would it be? Anyone care to share? Maybe Silent Night, Joy to the World, Away in the Manger. In high school, we sang this beautiful piece composed by John Rutter, *What Sweeter Music*. But the one that comes to my mind is Handel's Messiah. Quite a few of the movements of that piece are devoted to Christmas, the birth of Jesus.

Do you know what the most famous song of that work is? Well, of course, it's the Hallelujah Chorus. Now, while a large portion of the Messiah focuses on the birth of Jesus, the Hallelujah Chorus (even though it's often sung at Christmas) it doesn't. I mean, just listen to some of these lyrics: "For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth... King of kings, and Lord of lords... And He shall reign forever and ever."

Do you hear what the focus is? The same as the focus of today's worship. The last Sunday in End Times, Christ the King forever. As the church year comes to a close, as we faithfully wait for the return of Christ our King, we join with believers over hundreds of years to sing our own "Hallelujah Chorus," with our praise: And He Shall Reign Forever.

Now, if I were to ask you to rank books of the Bible by how easy or difficult they are to understand, what would you have at the top of the list for the most difficult? I would guess most of you would probably say Revelation, and it'd be hard to disagree there. It's not an easy book to wade through. But I would have that as my number two, with number one actually being this, Daniel.

Now, you might be thinking, "But, Daniel and the Lions' Den, the Three Men in the Fiery Furnace. What's so difficult about those?" Ok, I'll give you that, but have you ever read the other parts of Daniel?

Once you get past those historical accounts in the first half of Daniel, you arrive here, the second half, where Daniel records visions, dreams he had depicting where we are right now, the End Times. And just like Revelation, it takes a bit of work to understand the meaning of those visions. In fact, I believe it was a professor at the Seminary who told our class, "Once you can understand Daniel, then Revelation becomes so much clearer."

So, friends, let's unwind this vision in chapter 7. Now, our verses this morning make up the end of Daniel's vision. Not surprisingly, Christ is the focus, Christ our King is the focus. And Christ the King's kingdom is the focus. If you were to look at Daniel chapter 7 as a whole, you'd see Daniel's dream sets Christ's kingdom in direct contrast to four other kingdoms. He calls them the four beasts, and what's interesting about each of those four beasts is that we've actually seen them. We've seen their fulfillment throughout history, watched them rise and fall.

The first beast, or kingdom, looked like a lion with the wings of an eagle. That beast represents the Babylonian Empire, the same empire ruled by Nebuchadnezzar, the king who destroyed Judah, demolished Jerusalem, and took the Israelites captive for 70 years. The second beast/kingdom had the appearance of a bear. It represented the Persian Empire, the kingdom which toppled the Babylonians and eventually allowed the Israelites to return to Jerusalem.

The third beast looked like a leopard. That was the Greek Empire, most notably Alexander the Great, who even with his small Greek army, ferociously built the largest empire the world had ever seen. And the fourth beast? It had no distinct likeness, but it was distinguished by its ten horns. That was the Roman Empire, by far one of the most important and impressive empires throughout the history of the world, one whose influences carry even to today.

All of those, very powerful, very fierce kingdoms, but do you know what the difference is between those kingdoms and Christ's kingdom? I'll give you a hint. Which of those empires still exist today?

None of them. The Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, all in their own right, were formidable empires. All of them were seemingly invincible. And yet, what does history show? They weren't. One after another, every empire fell. Every power crumbled.

Daniel tells us why in his vision. He says, "The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time." Each one was there to serve God's purpose. God gave them authority, made them powerful, and when he no longer had use for them, he allowed them to be destroyed. The Babylonians by the Persians, the Persians by the Greeks, and so on.

But then, in our verses this morning, Daniel talks of one more kingdom...a different kingdom...Christ's kingdom. Hopefully, you see Jesus here, too. Isn't that who you think of when Daniel describes this "son of man"? The same one the martyr Stephen saw right before he was stoned in the book of Acts, **"Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."** Or the almost 80 times in the gospels Jesus called himself the "Son of Man," like, **"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

What makes his kingdom different? While these other beasts enjoyed massive empires, they still had their borders. They still had people outside their borders who did not bow the knee to their authority. Yet for Christ, "all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him." And not only that, but "his dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." Hear that again. Christ the King rules everything. Christ the King reigns forever. His kingdom lasts forever. It will never end.

Why do you think it's so important to remember this truth? Well, just open your eyes. It's easy to see Jesus ruling here today, isn't it? Or maybe it's not. Jesus' reign extends throughout the universe, and yet here, in our backyard, terrorists are running rampant throughout the world, killing mercilessly in the name of justice. People are terrified, fearing for their own safety, and it seems our King fails to intervene, to do anything to calm our troubled hearts.

Society continues to push the boundaries and blur the lines of what's right and wrong, calling it love, and you know they're winning more and more over to their cause with each day that passes. And yet, in a time when we really need someone in our corner to speak for us and set things straight, it appears our King remains silent and in the shadows.

The rulers we have here, supposed to be representing God, but what we see, unfortunately, they're far from it. Yet they receive no retribution or correction from God for their unfaithfulness, at least none that we can see.

Friends, a lot of times we have a hard time seeing how Jesus is ruling here, how he's in control, especially when it looks more and more like Satan is the one holding the reigns. And when you don't see your King, what do you do? Stay strong, stand firm in your faith in Jesus and in his power? Or do you waver, doubting, losing faith that Jesus can and will protect you from your enemies, both physical and spiritual. Are you slowly allowing yourself to be influenced by our godless world, finding that kingdom, full of lies, to be looking more and more attractive?

Or are you beginning to suffer from the same thing that took over the Israelites when they were in the wilderness and were losing faith that God still cared about them or that Moses would come down from Mt. Sinai after 40 days up there? But, instead of turning toward someone else to make you a golden calf, you're turning to you. "If Jesus isn't here, ruling, I will step in. I will choose what's right and wrong for me. I'll do what I want to."

Think of some of the greatest rulers this world has ever seen. Caesar Augustus, Alexander the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte, Genghis Kahn, Constantine, Hitler. Built great empires for themselves, but how many of them still stand today? How foolish those little men, who strut their moment on history's stage, imagined that history is about them, that they were invincible. Oh, how foolish you and I are when we do the same!

The Son of Man will return with all authority, not only to reign, but also to judge his entire kingdom, and where will you stand? Faithful subject? Or deceitful enemy?

If it were true that Christ the King was not in control and was not ruling over us, it wouldn't matter whether we were faithful subjects or not, would it. Our fate would be hell.

But it's not true. Jesus is King over heaven, and he's the King over earth. And though the fate we deserve is still hell, when Christ our King physically returns, we will get heaven. As the book of Revelation tells us, we will receive the crown of life.

And to us, it's no surprise why we will, but we never tire of hearing the reason again. It's because Christ our King lived, died, and rose. Jesus, he's not out of touch with what's happening here. He's been here since the beginning, since creation. He's seen a perfect world come to ruin with the insurgence of sin and Satan, he's seen how his subjects were being attacked by spiritual enemies, but he didn't stay away, wave the white flag of surrender, and let this waste away.

"When the time had fully come," he came to defend what was his. "When the time had fully come," Christ our King, God himself, became the Son of Man when he came to earth. Jesus became a human being so he could experience what you and I do every day, temptation to sin, but he didn't give in. Jesus wasn't here to serve himself but God's purpose, to save us. That intent was clear when he stood before Pilate and boldly stated, **"You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world."**

His last words before he went to the cross, where though he was treated like a petty criminal and the biggest loser, he was actually taking up arms on our behalf to fight our fiercest enemies on the greatest

battlefield this world has ever known, Calvary. And there, Jesus, Christ our King, Son of Man, died, having won the victory, crushing Satan's head, forgiving our sins, paying our debt of hell. And his resurrection made his triumph even greater, that even death and the grave could not best him. And for us, it's given us the guarantee of eternal crowns in heaven.

And that's where our verses this morning come in. When we think of Christ the King Sunday, we often focus on the Son of Man, victorious, returning one day with the clouds to take us home, the one last spoil of his resurrection victory.

But notice here, the Son of Man, coming in the clouds, but not here. He's approaching the Ancient of Days and entering his presence. There, Jesus laid his eternal victory before the feet of his Father. There, Jesus was given authority, glory and sovereign power. There our Savior became Christ our King.

And what does that mean for us today? In Matthew 16, Jesus said, **"I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."** Revelation pictures the kingdom of Christ as such, **"He will reign for ever and ever."** Martin Luther, in his great Reformation hymn, wrote, **"Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill; they shall not overpower us. This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will, he can harm us none. Our victory is won; the kingdom's our forever!"** Our enemies may continue to poke and prod at us, but they can't win. Jesus already has. And his reign, his kingdom, his victory will never end.

And we get to live our lives in celebration of that victory. We get to spend our lives praising our victorious King here. Now, for those of you who don't know, the Kansas City Royals won the World Series last month, and we have a few fans here who are more than a bit pleased with that.

I'm sure they would have been in the crowds celebrating the victory, but I'm guessing the excitement back here, however, was no less joyful. But for the Royals, as well as any championship sports team, the victory is short-lived. They only get a couple of months of reveling in their victory before they have to go defend their title.

Not so with Jesus. His victory is once for all...his victory is eternal. His kingdom will never be destroyed. And, while we long to be in heaven, celebrating the victory of the Lamb with the Lamb who was slain, but that victory extends to us here right now, so why should it be any less joyful? It's not.

So friends, join in the victory celebration with me. The Son of Man came. The Son of Man died. The Son of Man triumphed. The Son of Man will return, our victorious King. And he will reign forever. And we will join him. Live for that day! Join in his praise today! Amen.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.