

Let Earth Receive Her King (Daniel 2:44-45)

Introduction

There's a monument in Spain to the Roman Emperor Diocletian, one of the fiercest persecutors of Christians. It says, "Diocletian Jovian Maximian Herculeus Caesares Augusti for having extended the Roman Empire in the east and west and for having extinguished the name of Christians." The monument is in ruins, and that mighty empire is no more. But Christ's kingdom stands, and has extended to every nation on earth. In the days of Diocletian, who would have guessed that Rome would fall and that Christ would be hailed as Lord throughout his land?

Like yeast, it spread imperceptibly but powerfully. Pliny the Younger was a Roman Governor in Asia Minor, and he wrote a famous letter to the emperor Trajan just after the end of the first century. The governor complains, "The contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it. It is certainly quite clear that the temples ... had been almost deserted."

Justin Martyr, about the middle of the second century, wrote, "There is no people, Greek or barbarian, or of any other race, by whatever name or manners they may be distinguished, however ignorant of arts or agriculture, whether they dwell in tents or wander about in covered wagons, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered in the name of the crucified Jesus to the Father and Creator of all things."

Emperor Maximian near the end of the third century complained that "almost all" had abandoned the worship of Rome for the new sect: an exaggeration, no doubt. But now in every corner of the empire, people were saying, "Jesus is Lord." And Emperor Maximian with many others launched a vigorous empire-wide persecution to end the Christian movement once and for all, the worst persecution in the history of the church. And who would have thought Christianity would survive?

The Roman Emperor Julian (332-363) is known to history as Julian the Apostate because, although he was the nephew of Constantine and raised a Christian, he later became vigorously anti-Christian and worked to restore the worship of the Roman gods. When Julian was out fighting the Persians, one of his followers in Antioch asked a Christian there what the carpenter's Son was doing. What is Jesus doing in these days now that the empire has now turned from Christ to the Roman gods? What is the carpenter's son doing now? The Christian replied, "The Maker of the world, whom you call the carpenter's son, is employed in making a coffin for the emperor." A few days later, news came Antioch that Julian had been slain. He was the last pagan emperor of Rome. Who would have thought in those sorrowful days that the kingdom of Christ was destined for greatness and that in less than a century, Rome would fall?

Amazingly, we know from two ancient pagan historians in the first century that there was an expectation at that time that a king should come forth from Israel and rule the world. Suetonius wrote: "An old and constant opinion commonly prevailed through all the east, that it was in the fates, that some should rise out of Judea who should obtain the government of the world." And Tacitus has a similar comment "Many," wrote Tacitus, "had a persuasion that it was contained in the ancient writings of the priests, that at that very time the east should prevail, and that some descendant from Judah should obtain the universal government." And so it's not at all surprising then that in the days of Caesar Augustus, when Jesus was born to Joseph and Mary and

Bethlehem, Magi, wise men from the east, came to inquire, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have come to worship him” (Matt 2:2).

Why was there this ancient belief commonly held throughout the east and known throughout the world that *in those days* a king should come forth from Judea and rule the world? How would they know *when* God’s kingdom should come? Dear friends, you can search the Bible and other ancient writings in vain. The only place that it’s taught *when* the Messiah should come is in this book. It’s explained later in the book in more detail, but what’s perfectly clear from the chapter before us is that in the days of the kings of this fourth kingdom, then the kingdom of God will come, and grow, and overspread the world.

John Calvin writes of Daniel: “His dissertation on the office of Christ is one of the principal supports of our faith.” And from time to time I have wrestled with doubts and difficult questions. Why do I believe in Christ? How do I know this is all true? And there are certain supports that have helped me to stand in those moments. And Daniel’s dissertation on the office of Christ has been one of the principal supports of my faith.

Review

His revelation of Christ begins in this chapter, which we considered last time. By way of review, in 603 or 602 BC, God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, the future history of the world and the coming kingdom of God. Verse 28, “There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days” (Dan 2:27-28). You, O king, are the head of gold. After you will come another kingdom, but not with the same splendor. Then another of bronze, and then a fourth having the crushing strength of iron, yet a mixture, unstable. “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Dan 2:44).

And you’ll remember that this was announced in a very dramatic way so that everyone throughout the east would hear and be talking about these events. And unlike the rest of the OT that’s written in Hebrew, this short section is written in the international language of Aramaic, for centuries the language of diplomacy, trade, and learning. So God revealed the future of world history and the timing of the coming of Christ’s kingdom, not in some hidden corner somewhere, and not in a way that it would only be known after the fact, not in some confusing way. God did it very, very dramatically before the court of the greatest king on earth, and had Daniel interpret the matter in an unambiguous way so that everyone would be able read and know for certain that this is the real thing. The kingdom of God would surely come.

The Lord says through Isaiah, “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure’” (Isa 46:9-10).

Now we’ve already considered many different truths from the book of Daniel, but we come today to what is by far the most important. For the Lord Jesus Christ is the great theme of all the Scriptures. Speaking of the OT in John 5:39 “These [Scriptures] are they which testify of me.” And Christ is not hard to find in the book of Daniel. He reveals to us the savior with amazing

clarity and beauty. We're introduced to him as Christ the Rock here in chapter 2. And let's consider today five things that we learn about this kingdom:

1. Its Divine Origin

The origin is heavenly, in sharp contrast to the human origin of the kingdoms. That idea is twice expressed: once figuratively as the rock is "cut out without hands," and then once in plain words, as interpreted "the *God of heaven* shall set up a kingdom."

The fulfillment of this prophecy begins in the womb of a virgin who gives birth to a Son and lays him in a manger. "[You] shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:31-33).

Christ's kingdom wasn't established by any earthly power. There were no armies involved, no field of battle. But we find in Bethlehem a miraculous birth, the Son of David and the Son of God. the Kingdom came, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts."

And this prophecy is fulfilled not only in the supernatural birth of Jesus Christ, but also in the spread of the gospel without any of the weapons and aids of human power. After Jesus, twelve poor men spoke, and the world was shaken and kingdoms upended. As one wrote, "A word from God is stronger than all armies, and outconquers conquerors. By the mystery of Christ's Incarnation, by the power of weakness in the preachers of the Cross, by the energies of the transforming Spirit, the God of heaven has set up the kingdom."

Here are the great conquerors of Christ's kingdom that he sent into the world: a few untaught fishermen. They're explicitly forbidden to use the sword (Matt 26:52). They were given instead the despised and scandalous message of Christ crucified. The most learned among them suppressed every thing that sounded like worldly wisdom, lest he should make the cross of Christ of no effect (1 Cor 1:17; 2:1). But such weapons proved might in the pulling down of the strongholds of strongholds and took every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:4-5). And so the heavenly treasure was thus committed to earthen vessels, so that the excellency of the power might be seen to be of God (2 Cor 4:7).

And so began the kingdom of Christ, without human power, or ingenuity. Christ came down from heaven unknown, unperceived, with no worldly advantages at all, because of the love of God our Father, for the salvation of his people, a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence; but, infinitely precious to us, the love and admiration of his people.

That stone is made head cornerstone that builders did despise. This is the doing of the Lord and wondrous in our eyes.

2. Its Humble Beginnings

All the other kingdoms of the earth are very glorious and impressive. Verse 31, "You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome" (Dan 2:31). There is a magnificence about it. It

provokes admiration. There it stands, this great, glorious united statue. Here is the splendor and power of the kingdoms of earth.

Along comes an insignificant little rock. It's nothing to look at. How small in comparison. There's no glory. There no splendor. There is nothing to cause men to marvel. In comparison, it's like a little stone, insignificant, able to be overlooked.

And so it is in Christ's kingdom, beginning with its king not born in a palace and laid in a cradle of gold, but without even room at the inn, laid in a manger. Hear him say to a few poor Galilean peasants, "I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed upon Me" (Luke 22:29). Poor, despised, contemptible to human view, what was this compared to the iron might of Rome.

And a few years later, here is a Jewish man, of weak bodily presence, stepping ashore in Neapolis. He's accompanied by a doctor and a quiet young man. He asks someone on the pier to point him the way to Philippi. Who is this unimpressive man? What's he going to do? Surely he's nobody of importance. So it would appear to everyone. This is the apostle Paul, bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to Europe and planting Christ's kingdom in Greece and later in Rome. We find him and his friends days later in prison, their feet in the stocks, but they'd already struck the image with the first of many blows it's been receiving ever since, in the conversion of Lydia, a Roman prison guard, and a slave girl. But what are those three, compared to the great powers of the day? Nevertheless all mighty powers of Rome and Paganism soon bowed to Christ and then utterly collapsed, till the great empire was like the chaff of the summer threshing floor. We find in this kingdom not just a humble beginning but...

3. Its Gradual Progress

It became a mountain but it grew from a small stone. Here stands the despised Nazarene before Pilate, rejected by his nation, forsaken by his followers, accused as the worst of criminals, standing defenseless at the bar, about to be condemned and hung on a cross, "I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world" (John 18:37). Strange language indeed under the circumstances! But the truth is that his crucifixion didn't end his kingdom. It was the way to acquire it, as he "redeemed us to God by [His] blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev 5:9). From the humble beginning of a cross, he purchased his subjects and a right to rule them.

Beginning at Jerusalem and Judea, the servants of Christ preached to their countrymen. Things were fine for a few years. And then by small steps it spread partly by persecution to Samaria and Antioch, and then to Arabia and Asia minor, and to Macedonia and Rome. Soon Christ's kingdom claimed great and small, slave and free, even those from the household of Caesar and the Roman Proconsul of Cypress.

This despised and outlawed religion, spread throughout the Roman Empire and we often forget, spread with great power eastward to Persia and India. In a few centuries it had overspread the West and soon had made it to China in the east. And in the last two centuries, we've witnessed its greatest advance in history. It's been established in every nation of the earth and continues its career of conquest around the globe.

“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the *increase of His government and peace* There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isa 9:6-7).

4. Its Universal Destiny

The stone that grows into mountain fills the whole earth. It shall consume all these kingdoms. Daniel chapter 7, “To Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him” (Dan 7:14). Few things are more frequently repeated or more clearly described by the prophets as the destiny of Christ’s kingdom to bless all the families and overspread all the nations of the earth. Isaiah says, “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him” (Isa 11:9-10). Again and again we sing how, “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations Shall worship” (Ps 22:27).

Observe the kingdom first in the upper room, 120 believers huddled together in prayer fearing for their lives. Then consider what it had become by 500 AD though Rome had fallen. Look again at the turn of the first millennium of Christ when nearly all of Europe and then Russia converted and the church spread to China. Look again at the era of the Reformation as the New World is also discovered. And consider the present time, when there are more Christians in the global south and east than there are in the west, when more people today will be at church in China than in America. Mark these observations and consider that, perhaps if only the churches of Christ fulfill their duty in our generation, the work will soon be done.

Many tribes, tongues, and peoples are yet unreached and have never heard of the name of Jesus. But, says Daniel, “The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure” (Dan 2:45). “The great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The kingdom is concentrated in its King, and the life of Jesus, diffused through His servants, works to the increase of the empire, and will not cease till the kingdoms of the world are the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. That stone has vital power, and if we build on it we receive, by wonderful impartation, a kindred derived life, and become ‘living stones.’ It is laid for a sure foundation.

5. Its Eternal Duration

The kingdom is eternal. It shall never be destroyed, says Daniel, and it shall not be left to other people. But it shall stand forever. Christians can be burned alive as they were in Rome, thrown to wild animals in amphitheaters, exiled to rocky islands. They can be driven from their homeland, locked up in dungeons, and hanged on the scaffold. *Nothing can be done to stop their number increasing.*

No weapon formed against Christ kingdom will prosper, and every tongue that rises up in judgment against it, God will condemn. Many times the kings of the earth have set themselves and taken counsel together against the Lord and his Christ. And all the cruelties that they could devise, all the efforts that they put forth, have been leveled against it. But this kingdom has

within it the immortality of its head and Lord. It shall never be destroyed, and it shall stand forever.

Application: *To the Citizens of this Kingdom*

And so I address you, citizens of the kingdom of Christ in this faraway land. Other kings have their arms, their swords, their artillery, and other instruments of war. Jesus, our king, has his arms too, but how different! Here is the force of the truth, the strange supernatural power of the message of the cross. Here is the energy of Christ's dying love, the gentle but unstoppable influence of his Holy Spirit. This gospel, writes Paul, is the power of God for salvation (Rom 1:16). Speak and have confidence in it. This is what conquered the world of that day, and pushes its conquest around the globe in ours.

I read an interesting story this week. There was some admirer of British royalty who picked up a grain of wheat that five years earlier had fallen from the hands of the Prince of Wales. The man planted that single grain of wheat, harvest and sowed again, and again, and again, and in five years he had as much wheat to sow 16 acres of land. And as one man wrote, "If only we would catch as eagerly, and sow as diligently, the seed that falls from the hand of the Prince of Peace, we might soon be able with the increase to cover the whole earth. . . . If we but prized our privilege as fellow-workers with God in this matter, we should be found more fervent in our prayers, more diligent in our labors, and more [generous] in our gifts, for this great cause" (William Taylor, *Daniel the Beloved*, p. 54).

And let me say a word to you each individually. Christianity has not prevailed in the world without tremendous opposition. And neither will it gain victory in your heart without many conflicts. But do any of us have a cause therefore to be discouraged? Do any of us feel like giving up? Are we destitute of any power or hope? That stone, that precious cornerstone, which was cut out without hands, has the power to crush all his and our enemies, to demolish strongholds, and to bring even every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. And if the gates of hell have not and will not prevail against the church at large, neither shall they prevail against the weakest member of it. If the greatest empires the world has ever seen have yielded to the power and influence of the Gospel, so can the sins and desires and thoughts that oppose us. Let all Christian soldiers then lift up their heads with joy: their conflicts may be severe, but victory is assured to them by the promise and oath of an unchanging God.

Conclusion: *The Mediatorial Kingdom And Glories of Jesus Christ, Samuel Davies, May 9, 1756*

Let me conclude with part of a sermon by Samuel Davies, the first Presbyterian minister in Virginia:

Other conquerors march at the head of their troops, with all the ensigns of power and grandeur, and their forces numerous, inured to war, and well armed: and from such appearances and preparations who is there but what expects victory? But see the despised Nazarene, without riches, without arms, without forces, conflicting with the united powers of earth and hell; or see a company of poor fishermen and a tent-maker, with no other powers but those of doing good, with no other arms but those of reason, and the strange unpopular doctrines of a crucified Christ! see the professed followers of a master that was hung like a malefactor and a slave, see these

men marching out to encounter the powers of darkness, the whole strength of the Roman empire, the lusts, prejudices, and interests of all nations, and travelling from country to country, without guards, without friends, exposed to insult and contempt, to the rage of persecution, to all manner of tormented deaths which earth or hell could invent: see this little army marching into the wide world, in these circumstances, and can you expect they will have any success? Does this appear a promising expedition? No; human reason would forebode they will soon be cut in pieces, and the Christian cause buried with them. But these unpromising champions, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, conquered the world, and spread the religion of the crucified Jesus among all nations.

It is true they lost their lives in the cause, like brave soldiers; but the cause did not die with them. Their blood proved the seed of the church. Their cause is immortal and invincible. Let devils in hell, let heathens, Jews, and Mahometans, let atheists, free-thinkers, papists, and persecutors of every character, do their worst; still this cause will live in spite of them. All the enemies of Christ will be obliged to confess at last, with Julian the apostate Roman emperor, who exerted all his art to abolish Christianity; but, when mortally wounded in battle, outrageously sprinkled his blood towards heaven, and cried out, *Vicisti, O Galilæe!* “Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!” Yes, my brethren, Jesus, the Prophet of Galilee, will push his conquests from country to country, until all nations submit to him. And, blessed be his name, his victorious arm has reached to us in these ends of the earth: here he has subdued some obstinate rebels, and made their reluctant souls willingly bow in affectionate homage to him. And may I not produce some of you as the trophies of his victory? Has he not rooted out the enmity of your carnal minds, and sweetly constrained you to the most affectionate obedience? Thus, blessed Jesus! thus go on conquering, and to conquer. *Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty!* and in thy glory and majesty ride prosperously through our land, and make this country a dutiful province of the dominion of thy grace.