

Daniel 2:24-49 – The Kingdom of Kingdoms

Exegetical Big Idea: Nebuchadnezzar, as ruler of the known world is but a spectator as God's sovereign hand directs all of history for his glory.

Homiletical Big Idea:

All of history declares the glory of God's everlasting Kingdom.

Fallen Condition Focus: As exiles in a foreign land, it is often hard for Christians to see the power and scope of God's kingdom. We often see the kingdoms of this world and forget that even they serve ultimately to declare the glory of God and his everlasting Kingdom.

Intro:

You may have heard me talk about our old car that Alana and I had when we first were married. It was Alana's, who got it from her uncle when he got a new car. The thing served us well for a while, but then things started going on it. One of the things in particular that went on it was the gas gauge. I can remember the moment that it broke actually. There was barely any gas in the car as we were driving down the road. I remember looking down at the gauge and seeing it literally move up until it reached full and then stop. I've got to be honest, a part of me thought "It's a miracle!" Turns out, it wasn't a miracle, it's the normal thing that happens when a car gets old.

From that time on, as you can imagine, it was hard to know how much gas was in the tank. Without the gauge, you'd have to think about when the last time was you filled up, and how far you've driven. There were a few times that I was driving down the road and wasn't sure if there was enough gas to get home!

Without the gauges, it was hard to know how much gas was in the car. Now the gauge didn't determine how much gas was in the car, but it was a visual indication that all was well.

Before the exile. Before Daniel and his friends, and eventually all of Israel was taken to Babylon, they had visual indications that the kingdom of God was still present and active. They had God's holy city, the city of Jerusalem. In the heart of that city stood the glorious temple of God. A visual reminder that God's kingdom was there, and he was with his people. But when these gauges of the presence and kingdom of God were gone, it was hard to determine if that was still the case! Had God's kingdom fallen to the Babylonians? Had God been defeated by the gods of Babylon?

There were no gauges in Babylon.

There are often few visual gauges for us exiles living in this land of exile. It is often hard to see the kingdom of God. It is hard to know that Christ rules over all. When I read a passage like this one today, I'm giving the timely and powerful reminder however that God is sovereign over all, and that everything serves to bring him glory.

This dream is a timely reminder for the exiles that God's kingdom is not gone at all!

God's kingdom has not vanished or been destroyed, but rather:

All of history declares the glory of God's everlasting Kingdom.

Verses 24-30: The kingdom of God cannot be recognized unless God himself reveals it.

This section comes right after the drama of Nebuchadnezzar having a dream that bothered him and he is about to execute all the wise men of Babylon because nobody can do the impossible of telling him what his dream was, and then only after that telling him what his dream means.

Well a commander by the name of Arioch goes out to get Daniel and his friends in order to have them executed, but then Daniel asks for time so that he can plead for mercy from his God. Daniel of course receives mercy from God in the form of the revealed dream and its meaning. Daniel praises the Lord and heads out to find Arioch.

In verse 24, Daniel finds Arioch and tells him that he will appear before the king to interpret his dream. Here is where Arioch sees a golden opportunity. Look at what he says in verse 25: "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means". Did you catch what he said? He emphasizes that *he* has found a man that can do what the king asks. Arioch wants to take credit for this! Think of what Arioch can get if the king thinks that Arioch was the mastermind behind finding this impossible find!

Not only this, but the king of course is ready and willing to bestow riches and honour on the man who can do this. Nebuchadnezzar's own magicians said it was impossible, but maybe this Daniel is so much better than all the other wise men of Babylon that he can do it. So the king asks Daniel in verse 26 "are you able to me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?"

Nebuchadnezzar sets up Daniel for a home run. All Daniel has to say is "I sure can!" and he gets honour and glory and riches and so much more. But what does Daniel do? He does not take the opportunity like Arioch does, instead, he uses the same language that all the other wise-men of Babylon told the king: "no man...can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about"

Daniel knows his place before God. Daniel exhibits humility here in recognizing the reality that nobody can know the mind of God. This is not Daniel's dream. This is not Nebuchadnezzar's dream. This is God's dream. It is a mystery to all except God alone. And God, in his kindness to Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar, is revealing to them this dream. Now God does not *need* to reveal his secrets. God gains nothing by revealing this dream to Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar.

So why do it? Verses 29-30 give us the answer. God is revealing what is to come. He doesn't do this because Daniel is any wiser than anyone else in and of himself, but he does this so that the king would *know and understand*.

As we're going to see, the dream involves Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom, and so the Lord is showing mercy to Nebuchadnezzar in offering him a glimpse into the eternal sovereign mind of God.

As we've said, God does not *need* to do this. He can continue to let Nebuchadnezzar live his kingly life in ignorance and at the end of this days, Nebuchadnezzar will die and the world will go on. But God gives him an opportunity to see how he has been blessed by God, and offers him an opportunity to respond in worship.

The same is true for us today. God is not obligated to reveal his plans to humanity. God is not obligated to reveal his plans, but on top of that, unless God *does* reveal his plans to us, we are utterly incapable of seeing them!

[Soon after Alana and I moved here, I think it was before we had kids, we had some neighbors across the street who had a few small dogs. They've since moved, but one day I was looking out the window and saw one of their dogs on their front lawn. I immediately knew that it wasn't supposed to be there, and it became apparent that they did not know their dog was there. And then it started walking down the road. Still, nobody appeared from the house to go get the dog. I knew I had to go get the dog. Now before you think I'm somehow a saint, I remember doing begrudgingly. I did it more out of obligation than kindness. But anyways, as I go towards the dog, it obviously does not recognize me and runs away from me. To make a long story short, I chase thing around half of Leamington, through parking lots, in people's back yards, down ditches. Eventually, it gets tired of running from me and gives up and lies down. I pick it up and calm it down and start the long walk back. You know what I was thinking on my way back? I was thinking "I better get a pretty good thank you for all my trouble". As I get back and hand the dog back to the owners, I get a rather unenthusiastic "thank you" and that's it. In my pride I'm taken back because after all of my trouble, that's all I get? No grand gesture of thankfulness? Don't they know they owe me?]

How often does that type of thinking creep into our hearts against God. He owes us! If I'm generally a decent person, if I don't swear or hurt people, if I'm not as bad as the person next to me surely God owes me for my hard work!

Guess what, he doesn't. There is not a person who has ever existed that God owes something to. In fact, the only thing God owes us is wrath. For the wages of sin is death.

King Nebuchadnezzar is not owed an explanation of this dream! Daniel is not owed an explanation of this dream. That's not the point of this text. The point of these verses is God's abounding kindness in revealing to us his kingdom.

God in his kindness reveals his kingdom to humanity. Christ came declaring "The kingdom of God is here!" We wouldn't have known it. We wouldn't have recognized it. We wouldn't even be looking for it, if not for God's revelation. God has revealed his glorious eternal kingdom to the world through the coming of his Son.

Secret of the gospel of Christ is revealed to us through the Holy Spirit who sheds spiritual light on the Scriptures. None of us would come to a saving knowledge of Christ without God's revelation in our hearts and minds. None of us would know how our sin is deep rebellion against God and deserving of hell. None of us on our own would turn to Christ for mercy and grace to deal with our sin. We wouldn't recognize that the death of Christ satisfies the righteous wrath of God upon us. We wouldn't understand that Christ's resurrection destroys sin and death! We wouldn't know that we receive the gift of eternal life by grace and not by worth.

Do you know that this morning? Do you believe that? Then praise God that in his kindness he lifted the veil of ignorance so that you can see his glorious kingdom and be a part of it.

Are you seeing it for the first time? Do you want to know what that is? That's the kindness of God in showing you that you need him. He's revealing to you his glory and his kingdom. Accept the invitation and allow his kindness to lead you to repentance. All of history declares the glory of God's eternal kingdom, and the only way to recognize that is if God reveals it to us.

All of history declares the glory of God's everlasting Kingdom.

Verses 31-43: All of history has already been written by the only sovereign God.

Now we finally come to the dream itself. Here it is in verses 31-35. In the dream, the king was standing there looking at huge statue in the form of a human. It was made up of different materials. The head was made of pure gold. The chest and arms were made up of silver. The belly and thighs of bronze, and the legs of iron. Interestingly, when we get down to the feet and toes, they are made up of a mixture of iron and clay, a mixture that doesn't exactly mix.

As the king is looking at this magnificent statue, a rock is cut out by divine power. This rock I hurled towards the statue, and smashes into the feet. The result of this is that not just the feet or legs, but the whole thing gets pulverised into a fine powder it seems and is blown away by the wind without leaving a trace.

And sure enough, this is the dream! Daniel then goes on to explain the dream in verses 36-38.

King Nebuchadnezzar himself is the head of gold. He has a glorious kingdom! But his kingdom will not last forever, after him will come a kingdom that I represented by silver, a material that is of lesser glory. Then there will be another kingdom represented by the bronze, then another represented by the iron and iron mixed with clay.

Much debate has been had on the identities of these kingdoms. The reality is that the only one we are told about for sure is the Babylonian kingdom with Nebuchadnezzar as its king. Look at verses 37-38. Nebuchadnezzar is this golden head, but he needs to be reminded of something. Three times in these 2 verses Daniel reminds Nebuchadnezzar that he is king over this kingdom only because God has given it to him. This should remind of verse 21 in this same chapter. Daniel, in his prayer of praise to God after God revealed the dream to him writes "He (that is God) changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them".

[I remember when I was a young teenager, we lived in a house where my brothers and I all got our own rooms. Well we were teenagers and we liked to get on each other's nerve. One way we knew how to do that was by barging into each other's rooms. Well I thought of a way to deter this. I bought a latch and a padlock. I screwed it to my door and the doorframe and whenever I left my room I would lock the padlock and keep the key in my pocket. Even if I was just in the house, I would lock it up and keep the key in my pocket. Well as you can guess, this didn't last long. It worked though! But it worked a little too well. My brothers couldn't get in, but neither could my parents. When they asked why I did this my answer was "because it's my room, and I don't want my brothers getting in". You want to know what their answer was? "It's not your room, it's our room. We pay the mortgage. It's only your room because we have given it to you. Take down the padlock please".]

All of Nebuchadnezzar's power and glory and might is not truly his! It belongs solely to the only sovereign God over all. What good reminder for the exiles in Babylon! If this is the case with Nebuchadnezzar, it's also the case with the kingdoms that come after him. Kingdoms will rise and fall, as the LORD ordains them. Whether it's the Persians or the Greeks or the Romans or even the Canadians, God causes every nation to rise and fall as he pleases.

That's why the identity of the nations after Babylon is one sense not important. Now scholars guess as to who these kingdoms are, and here is what is generally agreed upon. After the Babylonians, there is a king who takes the throne who is a Median. He effectively starts an empire that is a coalition between the Medes and the Persians. This is called the Medo-Persian empire, and it eventually just becomes the Persian empire. This is likely the silver kingdom. The own the Babylonian territory and then some. Around 333 BC however, a massive force from Greece sweeps through the middle east and takes over even more territory than the Persians. Greece is likely the bronze portion of the statue. After Greece, the next superpower is the mighty Roman Empire. They likely are represented by the Iron legs and feet and toes that are iron mixed with clay.

It is interesting to note that the Roman empire ended up being divided before falling. This would make sense if it coincides with the iron mixed with clay.

While it is true that specific kingdoms are likely represented here, there is a bigger picture that since all of these kingdoms are connected to each other, it is actually a picture of one kingdom. Namely, the kingdom of humanity. There is one statue, and it's a statue of a person. This is a representation of all human kingdoms.

Which makes the transition of materials very significant. Look at how the materials decrease in glory, while increasing in strength!

Whether these are the correct kingdoms or not, what we are seeing here is the kingdom of humanity as a whole. This statue of a human, put together by different kingdoms of the world, really reflects the entirety of the kingdom of humanity. We may be glorious in our own eyes, and we may be strong in our own eyes, but just as the feet and toes of this statue are made of splintered and segmented material, so we as humans are ultimately unstable and unreliable.

Consider what we call "human progress".

We are *not* getting more glorious when you consider what true glory is. Humanity in one sense increases in strength as we invent and innovate and adapt. The Babylonian empire would have fallen at the hands of a fraction of the Roman Empire. The Roman empire would have fallen at the hands of a medieval army. All the armies of the past would fall at the hands of a single atomic bomb today. Sure, we're getting stronger. But we're not getting any more glorious. Paul writes in Roman 1 that humanity invents new ways to sin. With each new stride in technology, we find a way to use it for evil.

How foolish it is then to hope in the kingdoms of this world. This would have been welcome news for exiles in Babylon. Babylon is *not* sovereign! God still is!

This is good news for us exiles as well. There is no earthly kingdom so good that we should place our hope and trust in it, and no earthly kingdom so bad that we should despair because of its evil.

One thing is for certain, it is God himself who makes kingdoms rise and fall. God has given Nebuchadnezzar all his glory and power and might, and he can take it away.

Look back with me at verse 31. Notice what Nebuchadnezzar is doing. He's not doing the building is he? He's simply watching. So if the statue hasn't built itself, who built the statue? God did!

God is sovereign over all the kingdoms of the world, and not only is he sovereign over all the kingdoms but:

All of history declares the glory of God's everlasting Kingdom.

Verses 44-49: All of history shouts the glory of God's eternal kingdom

In the midst of admiring this glorious statue, the Rock that is cut out but not by human hands comes barreling towards it and smashes it to dust. The dust of this glorious statue is blown away by the wind.

This Rock that destroys the statue is yet another kingdom. But this kingdom is entirely different. Look at verse 44 with me. This kingdom that God will set up will never be destroyed, it can never be conquered and given to another, it will be a victorious kingdom, and it will be an everlasting kingdom.

There is no other explanation for this kingdom than the kingdom of God. And God's kingdom fills the entire earth, because "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it".

This is the establishment of the kingdom of Christ. He came "in the time of those kings". Now we don't know for certain the identity of these kings but in the sense that Christ came while earthly kingdoms are in power is certainly true. Rome was the world superpower at the time, and if the iron and clay toes are indeed Rome, then this makes perfect sense.

And Christ indeed destroyed all the earthly kingdoms of the world. No, not by physically taking out the Roman empire, but by his death and resurrection proved that his kingdom is victorious over all, and everlasting. In one foul swoop showed his power over all of creation by defeating life's greatest enemy, death. In so doing, he has destroyed any and all kingdoms set up to oppose him.

[I have the privilege of teaching and being part of the team that takes care of the pre-schoolers in the other building. There are of course toys in the classroom, and one of my personal favourites (the kids like them as well) is a set of plastic tiles. They are translucent tiles of different vibrant colours, and around the edges of these tiles are magnets. So what you can do is put the tiles together and they stick together by these magnets. You can build some really cool things with them. You can build towers that are as tall as I am. They look really cool and because of their bright colors, if you build something in the sun, then the light shines through it and casts a beautiful colourful shine on the floor. What happens, almost without fail, is that the kids will have something wonderful built, and a kid will come running over and smash into the building and it will all come tumbling down. It could be a massive glorious tower that was worked on for a long time, and in a single moment it all comes crashing down.

Christ's resurrection demolishes earthly kingdoms! All the glory and might of all the kingdoms of the world shatters like a tower of tiles because of Christ's resurrection, and God's everlasting kingdom will endure into eternity with all those who are part of it. Christ's kingdom is on the move. It's only growing. It will never shrink back. In fact Christ's kingdom is made visible by his Church today. What started as a room full of disciples in Jerusalem at Pentecost has exploded into the gospel being preached to much of the world today and churches being planted and growing in even the most hostile environments. Why? Because Christ's kingdom is the Rock that destroys earthly kingdoms and grows to fill the entire world. It is still growing today.

If you think about it. The dream itself is a picture of the gospel isn't it? It's not a coincidence that the statue is in the form of a human. It's not a coincidence that the Rock, who is Christ, comes and destroys the person. The gospel of Christ is not that he comes to better ourselves. The Rock does not come to prop up the statue so that it will endure, it comes to destroy the statue and replace it with something greater. That's the message of the gospel. You and I are not glorious. You and I are not awesome. You and I are not simply in need of an improvement. We are in need of death to our old selves, and new life in Christ. Faith in the work of Christ means dying to ourselves, realizing that we are not lord of our lives but that we belong to God. When we by faith believe in the work of Christ, we are dead to our old selves, and given resurrection life in Christ. We are new creations. We become part of the everlasting kingdom of God.

This message is how the kingdom of God expands to fill the entire earth. We are representatives of Christ's kingdom on this earth. Look at the king's response with me in verses 46-47. Nebuchadnezzar falls prostrate before Daniel, and exclaims that Daniel's God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings.

What's happening here? It's not that Daniel is receiving worship, or that he's taking credit, he is being a representative of God to the king. The picture here is that of an exile from a conquered nation, being honoured by the most powerful man in the world. Why? Because of Daniel's God.

Church we have a greater mystery to reveal to an unbelieving culture. We have more than just an interpretation of a dream, we have the revealed mystery of the gospel of Christ! And what do we long to hear from the mouths of those whom God, through the Church, reveals the mystery to?

Just Look at verse 47 to find out:

“Surely, your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of kings”

At first glance a rock is not as glorious as gold, but just you wait. We will see one day that:

All of history declares the glory of God's everlasting kingdom.