

Sunday 17th January 2021

Daniel 2:31-49 (Facing the future)

Talk by Ian Baldwin, Prayers by Kemi Ogundipe

Welcome

Hello, and welcome to our service. My name is Ian and today we will be thinking about how Daniel interpreted king Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Our bible reading is from Daniel 2:31-49

Let me pray as we start.

Lord thank you that we can meet as your people and to take this time to focus on you. Help us to set aside all the business and worries of the week so we might listen to you and learn more about your love for us. Amen.

Now Kemi will lead us in our intercessions then I will read from the bible.

Prayers

Let us pray to our heavenly father.

Lord, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandment, we have sinned and done wrong, we have turned away from your commands and laws. Forgive us and renew a right spirit in us.

Praise be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are his and he changes the time and seasons, he removes the kings and sets up kings, he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding, he reveals the deep and secret things, he knows what is in the darkness and light dwells with him. Lord in these few moments of stillness we bring before you our prayers.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Merciful God keep us under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress, knowing that nothing can separate us from your Love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly father, empower by your spirit all Christian people and the work of your church everywhere, give us grace to proclaim the gospel truthfully, not only by word but especially by deed and by the way in which we live our lives.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Creator God, we pray that you will guide those who manage justice, that they may be honest and merciful in all that they do and give wisdom to all who make laws ensuring that laws that they make may always prevail for the common good.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Father God, we pray that children may be brought up in the knowledge of faith and with a sense of respect and responsibility for others. Bless parents of our children, and teachers who serve the communities where we live and the surrounding area.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the source of everything good thing in life. As Marcella and other people are looking for jobs during this uncertain time, guide them the way they should go, provide opportunities as they search for jobs and provide the right job for them.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, we pray for those who are ill, sick, troubled in soul and mind those who need healing and all who have various problems and difficulties they are going through remembering Zak, Tim, Jon and family, Emma and family, Lorraine, Audrey, Val, Antony, Keith and Barbara, Karim's Dad, David, Roy, Alison's sister and sister-in-law and anyone you know and name quietly. In your goodness and mercy, grant them health of body, soundness of mind, peace of heart, guide and strengthen them through full recovery.

We also pray for those who care for the sick, those engaged in the caring professions and for family members who look after loved ones especially for children who care for parents.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Faithful God, in this new week, may we reflect your love in our families, our church and community so that the world can see that we are followers of Christ and Children of the highest God and draw others into his loving care.

Merciful father, accept these prayers for the sake of your son our saviour Jesus Christ.

In unity we say together the prayer our saviour Jesus Christ taught us.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.

Reading: Daniel 2v31-49

31 'Your Majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statue – an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. 32 The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. 34 While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were all broken to pieces and became like chaff on a threshing-floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

36 'This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king. 37 Your Majesty, you are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; 38 in your hands he has placed all mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds in the sky. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.

39 'After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. 40 Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron – for iron breaks and smashes everything – and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. 41 Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. 42 As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. 43 And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.

44 'In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever. 45 This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands – a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.

'The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.'

46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honour and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. 47 The king said to Daniel, 'Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.'

48 Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. 49 Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego chief ministers over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.

Talk

What helps us face the future? Is it knowledge, certainty, or our hopes and dreams that keep us going? Is it this desire that drives people towards things from horoscopes to new year resolutions? The desire to have some control over what is to come?

Now we can have control to some extent by being careful and assessing the risks involved whether that is crossing the road or investing your million pound fortune.

All we can do is our best and Nebuchadnezzar was no different he just had more power and resources than us and also a lot more enemies!

We heard last week from Laura that despite the power and resources available to him Nebuchadnezzar was scared by a dream. He wanted to know the meaning, what the future held and also who he could trust. So although he was a mighty king in some ways he was just like us as he didn't know what he had to face in the future.

King Nebuchadnezzar probably had loads of statues and was a worshipper of idols and images so to dream of a statue was spot on for him.

The image of the statue was of an upright man whose features and posture were terrible to behold. It was a man made image where

The head was gold the richest and most durable of metals

The Chest and arms were silver which is a softer and less valuable metal.

The belly and thighs were brass which is an alloy of copper and zinc less valuable again but doesn't take mechanical wear but also doesn't corrode.

The legs are made from iron and iron ore is very common but iron although strong corrodes badly.

The feet and toes are made of clay and iron which is a weak combination.

The materials of the statue get less valuable from head to foot but stronger perhaps signifying the kingdoms to come may be less organised than Babylon but stronger militarily and last longer.

Nebuchadnezzar seems to know this was important and it would affect his kingdom. This vision or dream of Nebuchadnezzar is symbolic and reveals something of the mystery of God. It is a sketch of history leading to the kingdom of God as promised to Abraham in Gen 12 and reaffirmed to Moses and the Israelites on Mount Sinai in Ex 19.

Daniel gets an insight (like other prophets) into God's plan. God had used foreign powers before to bring about his purposes and he will do so in the future. Israel had experienced this and was in the middle of such a situation when Nebuchadnezzar has his dream.

We heard last week that everything Daniel does is soaked in prayer v18 when he tries to understand the dream and v27 when he tries to explain to Nebuchadnezzar

Always putting God first as the source v21&22 it is only in God that he will gain insight and understanding and it is the same for us. The Holy Spirit brings us biblical understanding and wisdom. Firstly, Daniel has to admit that it is beyond his resources and he depends on God. It is interesting that Daniel seeks to explain the dream in ways that Nebuchadnezzar will understand. A lesson for us when explaining the gospel!

V31 The description of the statue is impressive. So impressive that Nebuchadnezzar was struck by the appearance and deeply troubled. So king or servant it is nice to know it is not only children who are scared by dreams. The statue is strong, terrifying until the feet. The feet (or foundations) are weak and therefore the statue is unstable and unable to last.

V34 Then there is a dramatic end to the statue, smashed by the stone with nothing left. The threshing floor will only contain the valuable seeds and all the chaff is blown away. Nothing of the statue is left because there is nothing of value to contribute to the building of the kingdom of God.

V35 Now God's kingdom will fill the whole earth. The statue is impressive, and Babylon will contribute to the next great power and so on but ultimately the statue and the kingdoms it represents stand in the way of God and are doomed to fail and fall.

Now there was at this time a common myth or tradition that human history would have four great ages with each one more debased than the previous. Nebuchadnezzar probably knew of this and the symbolism would not have been lost on him.

Daniel may have also seen a parallel with the story of David and Goliath a giant Philistine who stood in the way of God's people.

Or he may also have recalled the prophets Isaiah 2v1... and Micah 4v1. And their visions of God's house on a hill being established above all other hills and all nations will go to it for guidance and fellowship.

However, Daniel simply shows that four empires or ages will pass before God's kingdom enters the world with a new power. They could represent past ancient empires or modern empires like Napoleon, British Colonialism or the Third Reich. Equally it can be American Capitalism or Russian communism. Who the empires may be depends a lot on whether v44 refers to Christ's birth, death

and resurrection or Christ's return at the final judgement. It is open to much interpretation and debate, by cleverer minds than mine.

What Nebuchadnezzar had to learn was that his empire is as great as God allows but that ultimately the kingdom of God (Daniels God) will triumph.

In reality it is any system that shuts Jesus out and closes itself to the influence of the Holy Spirit, it is clear that Christ's coming is the most significant event in the history of the world. And Christ's kingdom will be the greatest. That is the message of Nebuchadnezzar dream.

The stone points to Christ cut and born not of human hand. The stone is Christ and his everlasting kingdom. There is an inevitability about the future because God has revealed it to us in Jesus. God has broken into the world and will overcome all that stands in his way until his kingdom fills the world and has no rival and has no end. When fully established God's kingdom will have no successor for Jesus will reign without end. This revelation presented to Nebuchadnezzar gives opportunity to repent for a great kingdom is coming. It is the same message as preached by John the Baptist.

This is the message we proclaim today that Jesus is Lord. His kingdom is here but not complete. The world has its dreams and empire builders and tyrants, but Christ is over all.

Empires are doomed and goliaths will be felled if they stand in the way of God's kingdom.

Chris is described in 1 Pet2v6-8 "A stone that will make people stumble" and "a rock that will make them fall" Which is God's judgement.

In Is 28v16 God says "See I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation the one who trusts will never be dismayed". This is our hope in Christ as prophesised.

Eph 2v20 "God's household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone"

So Jesus is the one we should build our lives on. He should be the cornerstone or foundation. However, we must also remember to look to him for Jesus is our hope for the future for in him we find forgiveness now and in the final judgement and the promise of eternal life with him in heaven.

The king is confronted with the reality that there is a higher power than Babylon and all its gods and that power is the God of creation, the God Daniel worships. Nebuchadnezzar was able to see there was something greater than his empire, something more lasting, and

Nebuchadnezzar was grateful his kingdom was not about to end but not converted or even repentant as the next chapter will show. This is because it was a surface knowledge not a heartfelt change. See Nebuchadnezzar caught a glimpse of god but never pursued it.

Remember this not only about global empires as it can apply to us and the way we run church, or our homes and businesses even our vision of our own futures.

We have to be careful that our response to God is not grand gestures and all show without allowing God's truth to penetrate our lives. The more deeply we trust in human creations the weaker our trust in God and the weaker our faith becomes. We must submit to the rule and reign of Christ in our lives and to proclaim Jesus is Lord and then to live it out. Our will must give way to the will of God. And look to him for our future for all that is not built on Christ will be blown away like chaff.

In the coming year we will face uncertainty. What will society be like post Covid-19?

What will post pandemic church be like with a new bishop and a new vicar and our merging with Holy Trinity? Undoubtedly there will be personal changes and challenges for all of us but like Daniel we must pray for guidance and courage to look beyond ourselves to God's bigger plan and to know Jesus is with us every step of the way into the future.

A future where we serve something better than ourselves because, like Daniel, we serve the one true living God. Our future is with God and it our service to bring glory to our God to whom we pay homage and tribute. Then our rest and peace will be found not in ourselves or manmade things but in God for our future hope is not in humanity but in Christ and his promise of eternal life.

Amen

A closing prayer from Romans 15v13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy spirit.

And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.

Amen

Thank you for listening and may God bless you this coming week