

To follow Jesus is to believe that Jesus is the King of the Bay Area, of the United States, and the world. The follower of Jesus is the one who then orders their life appropriately around the reality of the kingship of Jesus. It doesn't take an expert or scholar to notice that the world doesn't reflect the reality that Jesus is the King of the universe. So what do we do with that? If Jesus is the King of the world, and we see the devastation of war in Ukraine, if we see the continued pain of a world gone astray, what do we do with that?

Consider the state of our world—Russia continues to invade Ukraine with what feels like a 19th or 20th-century imperial expansionist impulse. While the numbers and the fallout of the war are hard to quantify, we know it is devastating. How do we hold this in tension and declare that Jesus is King of the world as we witness the fallout across the world? This is very much the question the book of Daniel is asking. The wars are different, but the violence is the same. The geopolitical powers and empires go by different names, but the abuse and corruption of human power leading to violence and pain are the same.

[Daniel 7](#)

How then do we maintain our faith and hope in the sovereign God even in the midst of chaos? There are no easy answers. I'm not sure we will walk away today with a clear answer. But we resonate with the fact that for followers of Jesus, we are not the first to ask these difficult questions.

The text this morning is really weird with beasts, talking horns, and weird animal-like beings. But as we read, remember that this is a detailed account of a dream. How many of you have had weird dreams? This is the same. This is a really strange dream that Daniel had, which he is retelling, but it is a dream that was given to him by God.

Another reason this chapter is so strange to our modern ears is that it is written in an apocalyptic genre. We do not have a worldly equivalent, which makes it hard for us to understand what is happening in the text, so it will seem bizarre. If you were in the ancient world, it would make far more sense to you what the author is trying to communicate.

When you turn prophecy into speculation about the future, you actually misread and miss out on all that the text has to say about the here-and-now. So don't expect to come out of this chapter with a detailed 12 step plan and a prediction about the future. In my opinion, that is not at all what the book of Daniel is about, nor is it trying to do that. Let's leave future predicting out of our time today because we want to be true to the genre of what is happening.

The Double Vision

[Daniel 7:1](#)

Notice that we have now jumped out of chronological order in the book of Daniel. The reference to King Belshazzar places this happening prior to chapter 6, where Darius and the Medo-Persians were in power. So it is a flashback to a moment when Daniel—not Nebuchadnezzar—had a dream, and he will need assistance in interpreting the dream. Remember the chiasmic structure to the book I mentioned last week. That is still very much at play here in this chapter.

Earlier, Nebuchadnezzar had his dream with Daniel's interpretation about a statue with four different kinds of materials comprising the statue, which were representative of four different kingdoms/empires. So too, Daniel has a dream with four different beasts with the beasts representing various kingdoms/empires. Chapter 2 and 7 mirror each other.

[Daniel 7:2-3](#)

Daniel sets up the scene, which is the "great sea." Now, remember this is the ancient world, and in the ancient world, the sea was illustrative and symbolic of chaos and an untamable force. The sea was often portrayed as polluted, turbulent humanity. For the Israelite imagination, the sea was a source of uncontrollable evil and was considered a dangerous place for people to be.

From out of this chaotic sea comes four beasts, each of them distinct from the other. This should sound familiar. Remember Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue and the four types of materials that were used to construct the statue? They were representative of four empires. Here we see four beasts representative of four empires later in the text.

[Daniel 7:4-8](#)

I warned you, pretty weird. Be sure to notice that the beasts coming up out of the sea were not animals themselves but were animal-like beasts: "like a lion," "like a bear," "like a leopard." We are dealing here with metaphor. I know the text seems weird at first but keep in mind it is metaphoric language.

Each of the animals like beasts that rise up is a beast of prey and dangerous to humans. So the beasts are animal-like, but they all have strange features to them. The lion has the wings of an eagle that are torn off and stands like a human and has a mind of a human. The bear had three ribs in its mouth, feasting on flesh. The leopard had four wings like a bird and had four heads. All of the imagery given here is meant to invoke fear and terror. I think the argument could be made that it is less a dream and more a nightmare.

After the three beasts just described, we get to the fourth beast. And this beast is like some sort of mega beast or super beast. It is both terrifying and frightening and incredibly powerful. One of the differences is this

beast has ten horns coming out of its head. The horns are representative of violence in every direction. It isn't likened to any animal because it is more terrifying than anything Daniel had seen before.

We have to remember that for the ancient Israelite mind, the original audience of this text, whose minds were steeped in the scriptures, this would have made sense to them. They would have been tracking with this familiar type of imagery. For minds steeped in the poetry and prophetic writings of ancient times, this would have been stock imagery, familiar imagery to the original reader. The fact that Daniel would have a dream about wild beasts isn't all that strange because it would have been imagery that filled his mind. Look at this example of beast-like imagery from [Jeremiah 4:7-8](#).

You see, the imagery of this dream, although very strange to us, would have made sense to Daniel's world for what it represents. Daniel has been steeped in this imagery, and he gets the dream; he gets the terrifying imagery.

Most scholars agree that the four beasts are representative of four great empires: Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman Empire. The lion with wings like an eagle is Babylon. The bear with three ribs is the Medo-Persian Empire, which conquered Babylon. The leopard like a bird is the Greek Empire that conquered the Medo-Persians and most of the known world in a little over a decade. The Super Beast with large iron teeth is believed to be the Roman Empire.

So the beasts are representative of these four empires, but even more so, they are representative of all empires in human history. Beginning with those mentioned already, the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, Roman, and also to the Ottoman Empire, British Empire, Nazi Germany, Communist Russia, etc. The motif of the empire in the scriptures is a motif of those who oppress the poor, devour the weak, and seek domination overall.

This is often how prophetic imagery works. It works on multiple levels, both in the context of its day as well as hitting on greater motifs that run throughout scripture and human history. These beasts represent those empires through history that have been vicious, devoured the poor, exploited the marginalized, and carried violence as its primary ethos.

[Daniel 7:9-10](#)

The scene shifts, and in the second part of the dream, Daniel can see both the beasts as well as the throne room of Heaven where God is seated. It would seem that it is a quick shift, but not in location as much as a shift in seeing both the reality of the beasts and the reality of God. Both things are happening at the same time. Seemingly below there is the world of the beasts, and above there is the reality of the Ancient of Days ruling. Both are present in the dream; it is a vision of one integrated reality, but seen from two perspectives.

The image of the thrones and the thousands of thousands surrounding the throne evoke images of authority and sovereignty. What is taking place right in front of Daniel is the battle between the beasts representing human empires and the kingdom of God and his authority.

But then the text says that "the court was seated, and the books were opened." You see, you have all of these beasts that seem to be running the world through violence and chaos. And then, in the midst of that violent chaos, God shows up as king and as judge. It is the imagery of God—The Ancient of Days—arriving with all of his royal power, and the court session begins.

All of the imagery is starkly contradictory to the beasts. Age, Ancient of Days, speaks to God's wisdom, authority, and power. White clothing and hair speak to his radiant purity. Fire is a symbol of God's holiness and presence. Millions of attendants speak to his executive power and authority. The opening of the books assures us that God is going to bring the world to its just and proper culmination. So God is going to bring justice to these beasts by exerting his power and authority. The books are opened, judgment is coming.

[Daniel 7:11-12](#)

As Daniel looks again to the lower realm of the beasts, the little boastful horn and the super beast are slain and thrown into the fire that consumes its existence. The other beasts were allowed to carry on for a time but were stripped of their power and authority. Neither the beasts nor the horn will win the day; God's judgment will reign. This is what we can be sure of, God's judgment will carry the day. There is a day coming when God will judge the world and will forever set up the Kingdom of God.

[Daniel 7:13-14](#)

So in the vision, there now appears "one like a son of man." This is meant to intentionally parallel the images of the "beasts" that were like a certain animal. Your Bible may have a footnote stating this phrase in the Aramaic means human being, but they retain the phrase Son of Man because it is the title that Jesus in the New Testament so fondly used to speak of himself. Son of Man was Jesus' favorite title.

The imagery here is stunning. In the very midst of a world ran by beasts drunk on their own power and violence, there arrives a son of man, a human-like figure. And this man is given power, authority, and glory. This one is given the right, from God the Ancient of Days, to rule over the world, and he rules in a divine-like way: coming on the clouds of heaven, receives worship, etc. Without question, this is a heavenly man but also just a man. A man who is both divine and human. Does this sound familiar?

Jesus would often not only claim the title of Messiah but would quote and point to Daniel 7 and declare when questioned, "I am the one who is like a son of man." Ultimately this is the claim that would lead to Jesus' crucifixion. He was claiming to be the fulfillment of this prophecy, which the religious leaders declared blasphemy and killed Jesus.

What a strange, strange story. It moves from beasts rising out of the sea to God seated on a fiery mobile throne of flames to one like a man. Yet, amongst all that chaos, it is the man who receives authority. And this man is given the power to establish a kingdom that looks a whole lot like the Kingdom of God established in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in [Daniel 2:44](#).

Okay, let's pause for a second. Daniel's vision is broken into two parts. The first part is the terrifying image of the beasts rising out of the sea. And the second part is the contrast of the son of man that arrives in the throne room of God. What is going on here? Daniel's vision contrasts the perceived authority of beastly empires and their impending destruction.

Contrasting the Kingdoms

[Daniel 7:15-18](#)

It is important here, as it is with all prophecy, not to get caught up in speculation about the future. This is not the intended purpose of prophecy; the goal is not to predict. Rather, the text highlights a consistent and reliable pattern that we see through human history. Empires rise, fall, overlap, go to war, destroy, and wreak havoc with one another, over and over.

The four beasts are representative of earthly empire after empire that rise from the earth. Over and over, they fail; over and over, they cause pain and destruction. But notice verse 18, the Kingdom of God is coming, and those who will reign and receive the kingdom are the "holy people of the Most High." Who is that? That is us—followers of Jesus.

There is coming a day when the Kingdom of God will be forever established, and the people of God will possess that kingdom and rule with God forever. But that day is not here now, and so we wait in the pain of the here and now.

This is the trajectory of the story—that God is and has given authority to the image-bearers to rule over creation. We have failed; power corrupts. But God is reconciling, healing, and bringing about the Kingdom of God into creation so that the followers of Jesus are restored through the work of the Holy Spirit. They partner with God to bring about God's healing and shalom to the world.

Obviously, the painful reality we are watching unfold in Ukraine is an example of human beastly empires falling in line with this historical pattern. It is another empire taking on the heinous war of aggression, causing untold violence, death, and unprovoked pain and destruction.

Trace through history, and you will see again and again the pain of human power being corrupted. The task of the church, the task of the follower of Jesus, is to continually seek to reestablish the rightful posture and reign of God. We will skip verses 19 through 22.

[Daniel 7:23-25](#)

Remember that the point is not to speculate about the future and try to determine specifics of who, what, etc. The point we want to draw on is that the fourth beast was a gnarly kingdom reigning with terror over the world. And they will have dominion for a time, a temporary amount of time, but time nonetheless.

But the closing line is a line of hope. God's people will have to endure a level of suffering, but it is temporary and only for an era. God is in control, and God is the ultimate judge and author of human history. Remain steadfast.

[Daniel 7:26-28](#)

God's divine verdict against the beastly kingdoms will come. The verdict is that all empires, along with their power, blasphemous evil, and oppression will be destroyed forever. God will bring their reign to an end, and it will be a total and permanent destruction.

What we see in Daniel 7 in empire is the same reflection we see in humanity. That all governments, regimes, and empires are simultaneously capable of good and evil. Part of the job of followers of Jesus is to exercise discernment of both realities—the propensity for good and for evil—and distinguish between the two. We then critique and champion the proper expression of authority given at the local, national, and global levels. This was the work that Daniel did so beautifully for decades.

This chapter is about Daniel looking out over the beastly kingdoms of the world that ravish the poor, show no regard for human life, and destroy the weak and marginalized, all in the name of their own power! Daniel watched what humans do to one another and over these beasts, with the hope of this story being that it won't last forever. There is coming a time when the Kingdom of God will be forever established, and God will destroy these other beastly empires.

Empires come and go, but God's Kingdom endures forever.

The text this morning is of importance in our current time. The entire book of Daniel is about how God's people hold to the hope that we have in the midst of chaos. God's people live in tension with the world around them, particularly when we live in a time of empire that is hostile to the ways of God.

While this dream seems incredibly strange to us today, it is a matter of hope. Because while Empires come and go, God's kingdom endures forever and will one day extinguish all other kingdoms of violence. There is coming a day when God will vindicate his people and no longer allow what humans do to one another and to God's world. How, then, do we, as the people of God, live as Daniel did at the destructive and painful intersection of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world?

This is the intersection that we find ourselves in, and for Daniel, the story is about maintaining hope in the midst of the chaos of history. It is clear that what our world has experienced over the past few weeks is the familiar uprising of beastly kingdoms. What we see happening with the Russian invasion of Ukraine is another example of a long historical line of beastly empires that exemplify all that is represented in these four beasts. It is the wrongful, evil expansion of one empire by an unprovoked war of aggression. And the fallout is certainly yet to be seen with devastating numbers. Nearly one million refugees are fleeing Ukraine and thousands of deaths have already been reported.

War is ugly, it is devastating, and it is an intrusion into God's world. We have been filled with grief as we watched the images of what is happening in Ukraine cross our screens the past couple of weeks. It has been the grim reminder of the fallout of our world.

So we ask the question that followers of Jesus have asked many times before. It is, in some sense, the question that Daniel is wrestling with

as well. What do the people of God do when they find themselves confronted with the beastly empires of the world?

Intro to Lament

That is certainly a more complex question than we can answer in this short time, but there is a simple yet profound practice the church has exercised before in view of the painful experience of life—the practice of lament. Now, while we are not directly experiencing the violent effects of this war, we take up the practice of lament as a recognition of a broken world and on behalf of those directly affected.

The Practice of Lament

Lament is a richly biblical and spiritual practice that the church has practiced for centuries to help process grief, fear, loss, and confusion. Laments are littered throughout the Psalms and other wisdom literature within the Bible. Lament carries a sort of realism into our discipleship. It recognizes the minor key. It sees the shadows of life. The laments rise up from the reality of a fallen world.

Often it is a practice that we avoid because of its focus on the harsh realities of the world. But when we refuse to lament, we cheapen the experience of the suffering. In a church culture that can be addicted to spiritual highs, lament looks into the face of the lows. It recognizes the systemic sin, the injustice, and the violence.

To lament is to wrestle with God, and it is to join with a long line of followers of Jesus who have also wrestled with God in the midst of sorrow. When we go on singing the high notes in the midst of raw reality, we stray from the biblical tradition and respond to brokenness. The Psalms of lament are the most common genre of Psalms; they are also the rawest elements of our witnessing the faith of our predecessors.

Lament is the exercising of spiritual agency in the face of loss, grief, and suffering.

Lament comes in times when the people of God are without the ability to act or change. Whether they are under the boot of oppression or simply powerless to change the circumstances that are confronting them. Lament is the refusal to give in to those circumstances and is the ability to act upon our agency in the face of loss, grief, and suffering. Regardless of circumstance, lament is an active step in the face of a crippling situation.

Lament is uniting our suffering with Christ's suffering.

While the suffering we experience is not one and the same as the suffering of Christ, it is a uniting of our circumstances with the suffering of Christ. It is to practice joining in the sufferings of Christ so that we may also join in the resurrection of Christ. We are not alone in these circumstances. Rather we are with God in the suffering.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

Lament is practicing the presence of God in the midst of deep pain and sorrow.

When circumstances that evoke lament arise, lament is our way of practicing the presence of God in the midst of pain and sorrow. It is the refusal to accept that God is absent and rather insists on God being present in the midst of the pain.

Time of Lament and Prayer for our World

Traditionally there are five steps in a lament: Introductory Address, Complaint that Describes the Suffering, Confession of Trust, Prayer for Deliverance, Expression of Gratitude that God has Listened. These are generalities, not strict boundaries.

Again, there isn't necessarily a wrong way to lament, but this is the general structure that one follows in a lament. What I want to do over the next few minutes is to walk us through a lament as we move toward communion. To do so, I want to walk through the text we had for our scripture reading this morning in [Psalm 13](#). What I'm going to do is lead us in a prayerful posture through this text as a lament for the brokenness we are witnessing today.

Lord, you are the King of the world. And through history, you have shown yourself faithful, the same yesterday, today, and forever. Lord, we evoke your name now—for the world is utterly broken and is showing itself as such again.

A Framework for Lament - Psalm 13:1-2

Spend a moment lamenting war, violence, and suffering. How long, Lord? How long must we see our world ravaged by war? Spend a moment in prayer lamenting these things.

We lament war. We lament violence. We lament suffering. We lament the violence and the broken evil of war. We lament the suffering that is taking place right now in Ukraine. Lord, we cry out to you because of the suffering, because of the pain. Lord, we need you now! Come, Lord Jesus, come.

A Framework for Lament - Psalm 13:3-4

Spend a moment praying for God's intervention. Pray for God to intervene for Ukraine. And pray for God to intervene for our world. Lord intervene for Ukraine. For our world. Lord, we cry out to you to intervene. Stop the bloodshed, stop the war. Lord intervene for the world you love.

A Framework for Lament - Psalm 13:5-6

Spend a moment once again crying out to God in trust. Declare your trust in him for who he is. Lord have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord, hear our prayers today.

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