

The Fragile vs. Firm Kingdom

Daniel 2:24-49

Rev. John Pennylegion

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Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny and I'm the senior pastor here, excuse me, and it's good to be with you. If you are a guest or a visitor, if you've been maybe attending for a few weeks, or maybe today's your first Sunday here with us, we are glad that you're joining us and if we haven't had the opportunity to meet, I would love to greet you, to welcome you formally. I usually hang out those doors right there and out in the gathering area after the service if you'd stop by and I would love to say hello and just welcome you because we are glad that you're here with us as we come to God's word and as we sing praise to him and as we offer prayers and come to his table, it's good that we would gather together. And this morning we're continuing in our sermon series in the book of Daniel, so if you have a bible you can turn to Daniel chapter 2. There are also bibles in the chairs in front of you as well as we project the passage you can follow along there. We're looking at the second half of Daniel 2. Last week we began there and before we jump in this morning, let me just remind you what the book of Daniel is about, right? We know that it's about the people of God living in exile, right? They've been taken away from Israel, they've been moved into Babylon, they're living under a foreign king, and they need to know how is it that they are to live as they're in exile.

And as Bob mentioned in his prayer, this is pertinent to us because we too are in exile, right? The New Testament says that the people of God, we are citizens of heaven. So it doesn't matter if you've lived in Roanoke your entire life, if you've lived in the United States your entire life, if you've never lived somewhere else, it doesn't matter where you were born, where you were raised, if you are a follower of Jesus, you are in exile because your citizenship is in heaven. That's where it belongs and that means that our allegiance ultimately lies with heaven. So how do we live in this world as exiles? Well that's what the book of Daniel is helping us do. And what we've already seen is that Daniel is neither separating from the world that he lives in, from the nation he lives in, nor is he assimilating to it. And those qualities, those categories are really helpful for us to hold on to, especially as we're coming to some of the next chapters of Daniel. That we want to be people who do not assimilate to the world, nor do we separate from the world. Okay, that's big picture. So where are we in Daniel 2? Well you remember last week, if you're with us, we ended with Daniel singing praise and giving thanks to God because this dream had been given to him, the revelation of the dream had been given.

So Nebuchadnezzar had had a dream, he doesn't know the interpretation, so he asked his magicians, his sorcerers, can you give me the interpretation? But just so you can prove your salt, prove that you know what you're talking about, you have to tell me the dream as well. And none of them could do it. So Daniel goes and he prays and the dream is revealed to him, but we don't know what the dream is yet, because that's where we stopped. Daniel has the dream, he knows what it is, he sang praise, and we paused. And that's where we're picking up this morning. So let's follow along in Daniel chapter 2 beginning in verse 24.

“Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: “Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation.”

Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste and said thus to him: "I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation." The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?" Daniel answered the king and said, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these: To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be. But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation.

You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold. Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery." Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court." (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you that we can come to your word and we ask now that you would open our eyes so that we would see clearly and we would know what you would have for us and what it means for us to live as your people. And so we pray, Lord, that you would direct us, you would lead us, and we pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, a couple of weeks ago when I first got my glasses, some of you had asked me if I had had contacts before and I just decided to start wearing glasses. I hadn't. I had never had need of glasses before. But in the months leading up to me getting them, my family started noticing how I couldn't read things on the television, how I leaned forward, how I squinted. My kids made sure to make fun of me for it. They're good like that. And I noticed that I wasn't able to read signs, right, especially at night as I was driving. I could make them out. I sort of knew the shape, right? I knew when to stop, right? But I couldn't really read the letters. And so finally, I went to the eye doctor. I went to Scott and checked me out. And sure enough, I need glasses. And so the other week when I got them, Kat went with me to the store. They came in and I went in. I put them on and they looked fine. I liked the way they looked. I looked in the mirror. I could see everything. I got in the car. I walked outside. I drove home and I told Kat that that whole experience was incredibly disorienting. Driving from the glasses store home was very strange because everything seemed to pop. Like everything was clear. I had no idea how blurry my vision was until I started wearing the glasses. It was amazing. I'm no longer squinting at the television, right? I can see the stop sign properly. I can make out the letters. It's wonderful.

I can see clearly. Now, the thing about these glasses is they help me to see distance, right? I'm nearsighted. So they're great when I'm driving, when I'm watching TV, but when I'm reading, reading a book, working on my computer, these are helpful for distance, but they actually blur everything that's close, right? And actually, Scott, my eye doctor, warned me of this. He said this was something I should expect. And maybe over time, I might want some bifocals. Now, I didn't get bifocals now because I can only stand so much of, you know, realizing my age, right, and my failing body. So those will come later. But you all know what bifocals are. The bottom of the lenses you look through so you can see up close. And the top you look through so you can see distance. So that with one set of lenses, you can see crystal clear, whether it's near or far. And that's what we want to be able to do, right? We want to be able to see whether it's near or far. We want to see with certainty, with accuracy, with clarity. That's what the bifocals will do. And that's what God is doing with Daniel.

Fragile Kingdom

You see, God is revealing to Daniel, and he's helping him to see with clarity what is near and what is far. He's helping him to see with clarity what is in the near future and what is in the distant future. You see, Daniel prayed to God to reveal this dream to him. It was hidden from the wise men. It was blurred to Nebuchadnezzar. But through the work of God, Daniel is able to see clearly. He sees the near future of the kingdoms of the world, but he also sees the distant future of the kingdom of God. And in the near future, what he sees about these kingdoms of the world is that they are fragile. They're fragile kingdoms. We see it with this dream, right? The dream. It's a statue. It's great and mighty. And each part of the statue has a different element, different material. The head is gold, the chest and arms are silver, the middle, the torso and thighs are bronze, the legs are iron, and the feet are iron mixed with

clay. And Daniel tells us that each one of these parts of the statue represent a different kingdom. In verse 38, Nebuchadnezzar is the head. Verse 39, another kingdom lesser than Babylon will come after them, and so on and so forth. Now, theologians and commentators have spilled an awful lot of ink trying to determine which kingdoms Daniel's talking about. Like, who is it that's coming? In fact, I know a pastor, and someone in his church, or someone he knew, I can't remember which, tried to convince him that the toes represented the European Union, okay? So 10 toes, 10 nations, right? And at the time, and you know, I don't think that's right, by the way. Just FYI. And there's more than 10 European nations now anyway, so it didn't work out.

But people, the point is, people have tried to discern and to figure out what these kingdoms are. Now, the traditional view is that these kingdoms are Babylon, the Medo-Persian Empire, Greece, and Rome. And there's reason for this, especially Rome and whatnot, but actually, I don't think that's the point. I don't think the point is for us to try and discern which kingdom goes with which part of the statute. No, I don't think it's the point because the text never actually specifies with certainty. And also, what we see is that the point is that these kingdoms, all of them, regardless of what they might be, regardless of who they are, regardless of when they rise, they all, with all their power and all their strength, are incredibly fragile. They will break apart and fade away.

That's what Daniel says in verses 34 through 35. "A stone was cut out by no human hand and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors. And the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them could be found." You see, as mighty as these kingdoms may be, they are ultimately like chaff. They're blown away by the wind. They're gone. And we know this, right? I mean, we just look at history and we can see this. We see that there were great nations, great empires like Egypt and Babylon, Greece and Rome, and they have all failed. The British Empire, do you remember what was the motto of the British Empire? The sun never sets on the British Empire. But the sun is set. It has declined. The Soviet Union raised and fell. They have all fallen away.

Empires and kingdoms and nations, they rise and they fall. Every single one. And one day, ours will too. Every nation falls because every kingdom of this world is fragile. Now, in coming to terms with this, we could throw our hands up in despair. We could resign ourselves to some sort of gloomy pessimism, like if it's all going to fail, if it's all going to decline, then what does it matter? We'll just wait till the end. But that's not what we're called to do, right? That would be a way of separating ourselves from the world. And that's actually not what Daniel does. I think it's amazing that Daniel recognizes he knows that Babylon is going to fail, it's going to decline, and yet he still seeks the good of Babylon. We see this in a few ways. He becomes an agent of blessing in verse 48. He is made ruler and chief priest over the wise men. So that means that Daniel is going to be placed in a position of influence where he can actually influence Nebuchadnezzar and the wise men towards the things of God. He can promote the things of God in the places of power. Or think about the fact that he raises up his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, to be rulers, to be over the affairs of the province of Babylon.

Or even consider when he's given the interpretation, Daniel isn't just concerned for the safety of him and his friends, but he's concerned for the safety of the wise men and astrologers as well. We see it in verse 24. He says, "do not destroy the wise men of Babylon." Now, I want

you to think about this. We can just easily pass over it, but I want you to think. These are people who would have opposed everything Daniel believed in, were the complete opposite of what Daniel stood for. And in fact, in later chapters, these are people who want to put Daniel and his friends to death. And so when he gets the interpretation that they couldn't come up with, he could have thought, "this is my chance. I'll go to Nebuchadnezzar. I'll say, hey, I got the interpretation. These guys are a bunch of charlatans. They don't have wisdom. They don't have understanding. Here are the interpretation. And by the way, put those people to death." He could have done that. He had the ear of the king. But he doesn't do that. These people who oppose him are against him, who in his eyes are pagans, because they were. He protects them. He preserves their lives. Even though the kingdom is failing, Daniel seeks to bless the kingdom.

And in this way, he's embodying Jeremiah 29. So Jeremiah is another Old Testament prophet. In chapter 29 of Jeremiah, the prophet Jeremiah is writing to people in exile, the people in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. He makes it explicitly clear in chapter 29. And this is what he writes to them. "Build houses and live in them. Take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there and do not decrease, but seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile. And pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." Do you hear what Jeremiah was telling the exiles to do? How they were to live? It's the very thing that Daniel is pursuing. The good of the city, the good of a pagan land, the good of a kingdom that's fading. That's what Daniel sought to embody. And friends, that's what we're to do. That as we live in this city, this nation, this kingdom, though it's fragile, though it's fading, we don't separate from it. We seek its good. And how do we seek its good? Well, we exalt God and we promote truth. That's what Daniel did, right? When he stands before the king, Nebuchadnezzar says, "do you have this interpretation? You've come to this understanding."

And what did Daniel do? He didn't take credit. In verses 27 through 28, he said, "no man can reveal this to you, but there is a God in heaven who revealed it to me. The God of heaven is greater than man, is greater than the gods of this earth." Daniel, in that moment, before the king, exalted God and spoke the truth of who God is to him. He exalted God and promoted truth. Daniel also preserved life. I already commented on that, but that means we preserve life. The young and the old, the poor and the rich, the educated and those who are not. We promote their life. We seek to preserve it. Whether people speak our language or not, whether they're from this place or not, we are concerned for their well-being. We promote life and seek to preserve it. And in doing these things, we are loving our neighbor, even the unlovable. And y'all, I was convicted about this just recently.

See, we have a neighbor, Kat and I, we have a neighbor who is not easy to love. We have a neighbor who is, there are lots of words to describe him, and kind and gentle and loving and gracious is not any of those. And not too long ago, Kat and I were interacting with him, along with some of our other neighbors engaging with him, trying to make him aware of a problem that was happening outside of his house, that he needed to be aware of. And instead of responding with thanks, he yelled obscenities at us. He told us never to help him again, not to make him known of these things. Okay, so this is my neighbor. The other day, we get the ice, we get the snow, and I'm sitting in my front room, sipping a cup of coffee, reading a book, enjoying the morning, and I look out, and there is my neighbor's adult son, who lives with him, in his van, and he has been plowed in. In his van, it's just spinning his wheels. And he has no idea how to get it out. He lives in Roanoke. When's the last time we had snow and ice like this, right? But the Canadian knows what to do. And I'm watching this, and I took

another sip of my coffee, and I remembered what the neighbor had said, his father: "I don't want your help again." So I sipped my coffee, and I read my book, and I thought about walking over and turning the blinds, so I wouldn't even have to see him spinning. And the Lord convicted me that that's not how I should love my neighbor. And so I put my cup of coffee down, and I grabbed a shovel, and I grabbed some salt, and I grabbed a two-by-four, because you need something to put under the tire, right? And I went and got him out, and he drove away. He didn't deserve to be loved. In fact, by the way his father acted, he deserved to be ignored. And I have no idea if he told his dad what I did, that I disregarded his father's request, and I helped him anyway. I don't know, but that's not the point. The point isn't that he would think I'm a nice guy, that I'm a good neighbor, that he would tell his dad. The point is, is that we love even those who are unlovable, and those who are hard to love, even when we don't want to, even when we've been treating badly. These are the people that we seek their good of. That's what the Lord was teaching me in that moment. Everything in me didn't want to do that, but the Lord prompted, the Lord directed, right, that we love and we seek good, not because our city will love us back, not because our neighbors would, not because our nation will pursue our good. No, that's why the world loves. The world loves because of reciprocity. If I love you, you will love me. But that is not how we love.

We love because we've been loved. We love our neighbor because God has loved us, when we didn't deserve it. He sought our good by giving his son. We were dead and yet he loved us. We were in rebellion against him and he sought our good. And so friends, we don't seek the good of the nation, the good of our city, the good of our neighbors because it's deserved or because it will preserve this place. We know it's fading away. No, we seek their good with love because it's right to love this place. It's right to seek its good because we have been loved. And friends, as we do this, as we live this way, we are living out what Daniel sees in the distance.

The Firm Kingdom

Daniel so far has only been looking through the lower parts of the lens. He's only been seeing the nearer future, but when he looks through the top part and he sees the future, what he sees isn't a kingdom that's fragile, but instead now in the distance he sees God's kingdom, the firm kingdom. Because that's what happens. The statue and the kingdoms come crashing down and in verse 34 we're told by a stone, not of human hands. The stone, it becomes a great mountain and it fills the earth and of course this mountain is the kingdom of God. And we know it because of verse 44. "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end and it shall stand forever."

Now I want you to notice the qualities of this kingdom. The first is it's supernatural. It's cut not by human hands. In other words, it arrives because of God. You see, we don't usher in the kingdom of God. We participate in it. God has brought it to bear and we participate in it. It doesn't come from our devices. It is the Lord's work and we are invited in. So it's supernatural. But the second thing is it's humble in origin. You see, it begins with a stone. Now think about all the materials that we've heard described, right? We've heard gold and silver, bronze and iron, iron mixed with clay. Of all the elements we've heard, the stone is the least valuable, right? A statue made of gold or a statue made of stone. The gold one is the one we're going to behold, right? We're going to look at, we're going to, we'll marvel at. And yet, from this stone, this is the very thing that God uses to bring the kingdoms of this world to their knees. The kingdom of God is humble in its beginning. And from this humble origin, it

grows to fill the earth. That's what verse 35 says. And verse 44 tells us it's indestructible. It breaks apart the kingdoms of this world to pieces, but this kingdom stands forever. Y'all, that is a beautiful thing to behold. That is an incredible thing to take in, right?

This vision that Daniel gives us of the kingdom of God breaking into the world, doing away with the kingdoms of the world, spreading his blessing throughout the world. It is a beautiful vision. And this is where many of us might want to say, it is a beautiful vision. But it is not what I see in the world, right? Because when we look around the world, what we see, what we behold is corruption and death, theft and brutality, hatred and anger. That's what we see in the world, don't we? And we don't even have to look to the world, we can just look into our own hearts. And when we do so, we don't see a lot of the kingdom of heaven. Because what we see is greed and lust, criticism and self-righteousness. And so maybe we wonder, where is this firm kingdom? And that's fair.

But we have to remember, we're looking through two lenses. That the bifocals show us the close proximity. They show us what is near. And what we see that's near is the kingdom of God breaking into the world. It has already broken into the world. We know this because in Matthew, chapter 3, John the Baptist says, "Repent for the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." You see, the kingdom of God, it has come. It has come because Jesus, this one of humble origin, has come. Jesus, the Messiah, the stone that was rejected, he has come. And by his life and death and resurrection, he has inaugurated the kingdom of God. And so where do we see the kingdom of God in our world? We see it in the cross. Because on the cross, Jesus took our sin upon himself. He descended into the grave and he rose to defeat death, hell, and the nations of this world to rule over them all. We see the kingdom of God already in part. We just don't see it in full. That's what we're waiting for. Because this inaugurated kingdom will find its consummation when Jesus comes again. That's what we see in the distance, that Christ will return, and that his kingdom will fill the earth.

And when that happens, we will not mourn the loss of the kingdoms of the world, but we will rejoice, because our dwelling will be with God in his kingdom. A kingdom brought to bear by grace and marked by love and goodness, that is the kingdom that awaits us. That now we dwell in a not yet, in an already but a not yet, right? The kingdom has come, but not in full, and so we wait for that day, and as we wait, we live in this place. We seek its good, not separating ourselves from it, not assimilating to its ways, but living distinctively from it. We pursue its good, exalting God, preserving life, loving our neighbor, looking forward to the consummation of Christ's kingdom. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you that there is a kingdom coming, and we thank you that Jesus will one day return, and when he does, we will dwell with him forever, in a kingdom that will be free from disease and death, sickness and sadness, a kingdom that will be marked only by love. We long for that day, and ask Lord Jesus, come quickly, but until that day comes, let us pursue the good of our neighbor. Let us love others as you have loved us. Let us seek the good of this place, so that it too would reflect your kingdom. And we pray all this in Christ's name, and God's people said together, Amen.