

**08.24.25 ~ Pentecost 11**  
**“God’s Kingdom Explained”**  
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Daniel 7:15-22** <sup>NLT</sup>

*The Vision Is Explained*

<sup>15</sup> I, Daniel, was troubled by all I had seen, and my visions terrified me. <sup>16</sup> So I approached one of those standing beside the throne and asked him what it all meant. He explained it to me like this: <sup>17</sup> “These four huge beasts represent four kingdoms that will arise from the earth. <sup>18</sup> But in the end, the holy people of the Most High will be given the kingdom, and they will rule forever and ever.”

<sup>19</sup> Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, the one so different from the others and so terrifying. It had devoured and crushed its victims with iron teeth and bronze claws, trampling their remains beneath its feet. <sup>20</sup> I also asked about the ten horns on the fourth beast’s head and the little horn that came up afterward and destroyed three of the other horns. This horn had seemed greater than the others, and it had human eyes and a mouth that was boasting arrogantly. <sup>21</sup> As I watched, this horn was waging war against God’s holy people and was defeating them, <sup>22</sup> until the Ancient One—the Most High—came and judged in favor of his holy people. Then the time arrived for the holy people to take over the kingdom.

**Leader: These Are Prophetic Words from God.**

**People: Thanks be to God!**

**Matthew 13:47-50** <sup>NKJV</sup>

*The Parable of the Dragnet*

<sup>47</sup> “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, <sup>48</sup> which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. <sup>49</sup> So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, <sup>50</sup> and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

**Leader: These Are Jesus’ Words of Warning.**

**All: Thanks be to God!**

**Please pray with me:**

Heavenly Father, we ponder and may not understand these imaginative words of prophecy but that is why we are here today. Inform us with your divine presence and wisdom so that we can connect more deeply with you. Lord, we seek you and your direction now with these prophetic words and parables. Help us to affirm and strengthen our relationship with you, so that we will be with the righteous at the end of times. Open our minds and hearts as you guide us through this message and messenger. Thank you for your love and steadfast presence every day. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

On Friday, during a poignant and beautiful memorial service for our custodian's nephew who died way too young, I was reminded how diverse and united heaven will be. His extended family and friends numbered over 130 people, and the guest pastor delivered the message in Spanish. While I do not speak the language, I understood the most important words, the grief, disappointment, and the love of family that poured out of each one who spoke. They were grateful to be in this sacred space they so gently and vigorously steward each week, and it was a privilege to be present in their pain, remembering the hope of Jesus.

Today is the second of three sermon lessons about God's kingdom and our place in it from the visionary book of Daniel and Jesus' parables in Matthew. I do not have all the answers about this topic, and as I said last week, it will help you to listen carefully, perhaps do your own research, and chew on the material during the week. The sermons are posted on our church website under the tab, "Services."

The context of Chapter 7 is during the Babylonian captivity, where before exile, Israel knew God had set them apart; they hoped and longed for his blessing and promised inheritance. Daniel and many young, strong, capable male Jews had been captured and recruited for a special program of development. However, the general state of affairs during exile was that they suffered under pagan monarchs and were forced to mix with a heathen society. The empire of Babylon stretched from India to the borders of the Mediterranean Sea (we sometimes incorrectly say Asia), but the architectural remains are in modern day Iraq, 56 miles south of Baghdad, the present capital of Iraq. Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon who had conquered Jerusalem and deported the Jews, had

died, several family kings had ruled poorly, and Belshazzar was regent. He was an evil ruler and cared nothing for the Jews.

The land of Israel, on the other hand, Jerusalem's city walls, and the temple had all been destroyed, so the Jews were adapting to survive, but felt abandoned. Even Daniel, a faithful follower of God and a prophet loved and informed by God, felt vulnerable. Earlier in the book of Daniel, the prophetic visions and experiences were interpreted by him for the benefit of others; but this startling vision of the four beasts was God's prophecy given just for Daniel to share with his trusted people. There were certain categories of visions that even Daniel could not interpret for himself or anyone. These verses today are of that type, so he needed help. As he wrestled within himself for an explanation for this disturbing dream of the four beasts, he became anxious and had to seek help from celestial sources; God provided an angel, later identified as Gabriel, to reveal its meaning.

Let's recall what we know from last week. The four (4) great beasts represent four (4) kingdoms: Babylon (the lion), Medo-Persia (the bear), Greece (winged leopard), and Rome (the mongrel beast). These represented four empires that threatened the existence of God's people, but we know a Messiah was promised who would save them. This vision meant that for a time, the four empires would rise up and rule over the land and the people of Israel, even though 500 years earlier, David's covenant with God stated that **his** descendants would rule Israel and provide a Messianic heir to God's kingdom. That would assure the fulfillment of Israel's supremacy and the coming of the Messiah who we know as Jesus Christ. That is important context.

We can imagine the stress of Daniel trying to make sense of all he knows and is experiencing, much less these bizarre images of powerful beasts. The phrase he uses “my spirit within me was anxious” made sense to me in today’s fearful world, but the scholars explain it was more of a grieving statement, a feeling of his being sorrowful and distressed over what might happen. The Ancient of Days would prevail, however, over the worst of the beasts and the worst of the times. Isn’t that a positive, hopeful message for us? The saints of the “most High”, that is, believing Jews, would gain the kingdom despite evildoers like the “apocalyptic supervillain,” Antiochus Epiphanes, who made war on the saints and persecuted those he conquered. Later the Maccabees would retake Jerusalem and restore the temple, revolting against Antiochus.

In this apocalyptic literature, the first three beasts, in other words, would be defeated by God, and eschatologically, the fourth beast battle would be on the plains of Megiddo during Armageddon, which according to Revelation, was to be the great conflict of the last days when evil tries to stamp out the righteous. We know that God wins that supreme battle, but we must be ready for it. Come back next week to hear the last of these lessons; we can all brush up on the history and the visions together.

Last week’s parables in the Gospel of Matthew of the hidden treasure in the field and the pearl of great price were about the rewards, cost, and value of sacrifice and surrendering to God’s will. This week’s parable is a familiar one if you attended the Adult VBS (Vacation Bible School) we had in 2022. You can see on the bulletin cover the net of the fishermen we used to show the meaning of the parable. Some call it a dragnet because two boats of fishermen, each with one end of the net on

his boat, they would sail close together and literally drag the net through the water to capture more fish! This story was told while the disciples were on the Sea of Galilee, so I imagine the meaning of separating the fish was quite visceral and understandable. There were at least twenty-four species of fish there and many were inedible or unclean. Like today's fishing nets, sometimes odd things get caught up in them, so the fisherman in Biblical days had to sort the fish by hand to throw out the too young ones, bad ones, or any trash they might have pulled in with it and keep the good fish for eating or to sell.

This ties into our Daniel passage as a future warning and instruction. Jesus is teaching his disciples two lessons. First, he is cautioning them about the time following his punishment (that is, the crucifixion and resurrection which they do not yet understand) when the disciples themselves will be sifted first by the authorities and then by God between true and loyal believers or those who were simply curious. Second, he is warning them about the end of the age when the wicked will be separated from the righteous. Those are both serious messages for us today. No matter how much we complain about the world's chaos, violence, and lack of resources, we know this separation and judgment is not ours to do. That judgment will be Christ's task when Jesus returns to establish His kingdom. The parallel for us is that the net is wide, but the Kingdom draws into itself people with different motives, cultures, morality, and beliefs. Who are we "dragging" or inviting into the net? We need to be like the two boats, catching as many fish as we can, and then letting God do the separating. Be patient; it is not our task to judge, just to fish. It is similar to the wheat and tare's parable; plant good seeds and let

all grow together. The strong and the righteous will be sorted; the hypocrites and sincere believers will be judged and separated. Which group will you find yourself in? In which group will the Christian Church find itself? Will our church family be among the righteous? We have some time left but do not know when Jesus will return, so shall we get moving? Do you feel that sense of urgency from the prophecy and the dragnet parable? I hope so; food for thought and action. Amen. ||

**Let us pray.** Dear Lord, we come to you on our knees not understanding the circumstances of our world today. Forgive our selfishness and judgment of others. Thank you for imaginative language that gets our attention. Help us to remember to cast a wider net and let you do the separation when you come into your kingdom. Help us to do the work of the Gospel preparing for you. And please help us to stop judging others and focus on building our own relationship with you. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.