

08.17.25 ~ Pentecost 10
“God’s Kingdom Costs & Value”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Daniel 7:1-14 ^{NLT}

Daniel’s Vision of Four Beasts

¹ Earlier, during the first year of King Belshazzar’s reign in Babylon, Daniel had a dream and saw visions as he lay in his bed. He wrote down the dream, and this is what he saw.

² In my vision that night, I, Daniel, saw a great storm churning the surface of a great sea, with strong winds blowing from every direction. ³ Then four huge beasts came up out of the water, each different from the others.

⁴ The first beast was like a lion with eagles’ wings. As I watched, its wings were pulled off, and it was left standing with its two hind feet on the ground, like a human being. And it was given a human mind.

⁵ Then I saw a second beast, and it looked like a bear. It was rearing up on one side, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And I heard a voice saying to it, “Get up! Devour the flesh of many people!”

⁶ Then the third of these strange beasts appeared, and it looked like a leopard. It had four bird’s wings on its back, and it had four heads. Great authority was given to this beast.

⁷ Then in my vision that night, I saw a fourth beast—terrifying, dreadful, and very strong. It devoured and crushed its victims with huge iron teeth and trampled their remains beneath its feet. It was different from any of the other beasts, and it had ten horns.

⁸ As I was looking at the horns, suddenly another small horn appeared among them. Three of the first horns were torn out by the roots to make room for it. This little horn had eyes like human eyes and a mouth that was boasting arrogantly.

⁹ I watched as thrones were put in place
and the Ancient One sat down to judge.

His clothing was as white as snow,
his hair like purest wool.

He sat on a fiery throne
with wheels of blazing fire,

¹⁰ and a river of fire was pouring out,
flowing from his presence.

Millions of angels ministered to him;
many millions stood to attend him.

Then the court began its session,
and the books were opened.

¹¹ I continued to watch because I could hear the little horn’s boastful speech. I kept watching until the fourth beast was killed and its body was destroyed by fire. ¹² The

other three beasts had their authority taken from them, but they were allowed to live a while longer.

¹³ As my vision continued that night, I saw someone like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed.

Leader: These Are Prophetic Words from God.

People: Thanks be to God!

Matthew 13:44-46 NKJV

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

⁴⁴ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶ who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Leader: These Are Jesus’ Words of Insight.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the imaginative words that reveal your own creativity and Kingdom expectations. Forgive us if we cannot understand your Scriptures easily. Enlighten us with your divine insights and comprehension so that we can connect more deeply with you. Lord, we seek your presence now and your direction with these prophetic words and parables. Help us to see the cost and value of your Kingdom hospitality within these stories. 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.

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Praise God we have our new air conditioning compressors in place, thanks to a small crane and the expert skills and patience of a team of technicians. Praise God there were no injuries, just a lot of grease! Each compressor weighed over 2000 pounds and the cost was substantial. But we know on these hot summer days, the **value** of their work and that equipment far surpasses the cost. So it **is** with God’s kingdom and our relationship with Jesus Christ. Today is the first of three sermons about

God's kingdom and our place in it from the visionary book of Daniel and Jesus' parables in Matthew. You'll have to listen carefully and chew on this material all week to get the most from it. As usual, the sermons are posted on our church website under the tab, "Services."

The context of the first descriptive passage is 553 BC in the first year of Belshazzar's 10-year reign as regent, after Nebuchadnezzar's 45-year reign of Babylon and other family short term kings. This was after the fiery furnace story and 14 years before Daniel's lions den story. Up until now, Daniel had been the king's interpreter of dreams about the past and present; the stories were familiar to the people. From Chapter 7 on though, God sent Daniel dreams and visions of his own. While sleeping, Daniel dreamed of imaginative visions that had deeper meaning for the future and were shocking to the people who heard them.

In today's reading, four winds, or in our translation a great storm, agitated the sea. These represented the creation-out-of-chaos story: God's heavens and earth separation, sky, air and water. Four beasts rising from the churning seas represented four kingdoms of that geographic area: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, but since all scholars do not agree, I cannot verify a specific nation to each beast, but I'll try. The first one was a lion with eagle wings representing power and strength. The wings signify swiftness and speed but were cut off; most assume this is Babylon. The second beast was a ravenous bear with formidable strength, although ungainly and clumsy. Because this bear devoured flesh it was interpreted to be Medo-Persia who devoured other kingdoms by aggressively and violently conquering them. The third was like a leopard, swift, cunning, and agile with four wings like a bird. The leopard had 4

heads with authority to rule; the wings symbolized speed to act and most agree it symbolized Greece. The fourth and last beast had parts of the three and was more terrifying. This beast had boastful intelligence, which seemed to be Rome. The beast had large iron teeth that had crushed the previous three beasts and ten horns representing ten kings. There was an extra horn that surfaced among the ten that had also uprooted three of the other horns which represented the victor deposing three kings. This image pointed to an “apocalyptic supervillain”, Antiochus Epiphanes, who had no right to the throne, spoke against God, plundered Jewish wealth, but succeeded to the throne years later by beating out his brother. He is referred to as the beastly archetype from Daniel’s visions.

In verses 9-12, Daniel saw the throne of judgment, the Ancient of Days, who controls men and women. He witnessed in his vision a flaming throne with wheels like a chariot similar to what Ezekiel saw as the Glory of God in Ezekiel 1, so consistency added weight to the vision.

In the last section, verses 13-14, Daniel saw the Son of Man. Jesus took this term for himself from this prophecy. For Daniel, all power and authority of the kingdom were placed on the Son of Man’s shoulders, and all the people worshipped him. Sound familiar like Isaiah or the New Testament?

Daniel actually wrote down his dreams and visions, knowing they were important communications from God for him and others to remember. They revealed the strategic future as a call to loyalty to God’s kingdom rather than the dangerous nations of the four beasts. They were symbolic and literary images rather than truly prophetic, yet sound like they could be relevant with today’s global situation and leadership.

Attempts to pursue peace in the Middle East and between Russia and Ukraine smack of similar aggressive and violent takeovers. Yet as believers, we have the hope of Christ. Loyalty to the Kingdom of the Son of Man who is the Messiah will be rewarded eternally and by God himself. So, we are not to worry about the chaos.

The Daniel background sets the instructive tone for the two parables in Matthew of the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price. In context, Jesus is no longer with the multitude by the sea; rather he has gone into the house to be with his close network of disciples. He has dealt with parables of sight and human understanding with the crowds, but now enters into a secret, divine mode of teaching for his men of faith. He would soon be leaving them, and so he must reveal **His** Kingdom to the spiritual men and few women who could understand the inner mysteries of God (even if not until after the Resurrection).

These two parables are to be read as one text to teach incomparable worth and triumph of the Kingdom of God. People in Palestine often hid treasures in fields they owned, but the family might never discover their existence if the patriarch or person who hid them died. The hidden treasure story looks to the past, while the pearl parable hints at a future understanding of Jesus' priceless value to us, despite the human cost. Some scholars say Jesus is the true treasure and the field is the Gospel fertile ground. The farmer who plowed it up represents seekers of truth and God's wisdom.

Scholars disagree about the roles represented by the pearl and the merchantman. 1800's literature says Jesus is the Pearl, but 20th Century scholarship says Jesus is the "Merchantman" or store owner searching for

the pearls. I lean toward this interpretation because both the field owner and the seeker of pearls sold all that they had to acquire such value. Their cost was like Jesus who gave all for us; he sacrificed everything for our salvation and eternal life because he loves us.

Although their world and ours felt and still feels chaotic and violent, it is not hopeless! There are more interpretations to these parables about how slowly a pearl is formed as waste or scar tissue, and how it is hidden in the earth-bound shell until discovered by Jesus; but the most important bridge between the three stories is that there is victory in the kingdom of God. God's kingdom prevails against all nations and competing earthly interests, a message we need to hear today. The Pearl's interpretation reveals God's victory even though humanity failed and crucified their own Savior. Please recall that in Matthew's Gospel, none of that has happened yet, so we and his disciples struggled to fully understand. As believers who remember his sacrifice through communion, we value the cost and reward. We know the cost of love and discipleship; we honor and return that investment with our lives, love for him and one another. Which kingdom will you choose? Humankind's or God's? Let us ponder these symbols to see if we would sell it all or sacrifice everything we cherish if asked. Amen? Amen. ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we come to you often in our arrogance of want and desire. Forgive our selfishness and judgment. Thank you for creativity and imagination, your patience, and generosity. Help us to count the cost and love the value of a relationship with you. May you broaden our understanding of your treasures. Please open our minds and hearts to be more generous in our faith wealth and our earthly treasures. Thank you for your grace and wisdom. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.