

To Restore God's Kingdom

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[0 : 0 0] Our Father, thank you for Christmas. Thank you for your Son coming down and becoming human, taking on flesh. We pray that today you would open our eyes to more of what that means, how great Jesus is, what it means for our lives. Would we come away encouraged and changed? Lord, the gospel is wonderful. There's so much we can keep growing in. Help us to grow to love Jesus more. In his name we pray. Amen. Great, and Hannah is going to come up and read the scripture passage. Welcome back.

The reading today is from Daniel 7, which can be found on page 697 of the Church Bible, and it's from verse 1 to 18.

So from verse 1, In the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. Daniel declared, I saw it in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea, and four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. The first was like a lion and had eagle's wings. Then as I looked, its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. And behold, another beast, a second one like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth, and it was told, Arise, devour much flesh. After this I looked, and behold, another like a leopard with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth. It devoured and broken pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool. His throne was fiery flames. Its wheels were burning fire.

[3 : 1 4] A stream of fire issued and came out from before him. A thousand thousand served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking.

And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. And his dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this.

So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. These four great beasts are four kings who will arise out of the earth, but the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever. This is the word of the Lord.

Great. Thank you, Hannah. You probably wonder, what is this all about?

[5 : 0 0] It's the most often quoted passage from the Old Testament and New Testament, but you probably think, what does this have to do with Christmas, right? We're the angels and the shepherds. Actually, this passage is all about Christmas, but we're going to get there. We need to do a bit of work for that. I wondered, why don't we start with Christmas? Christmas is, of course,

about God taking on flesh, Jesus becoming human. Quite often we focus on the big condescension, how infinite God becomes human. But just think about what it means. Just imagine, maybe, for us to imagine it a bit more. Imagine that Jesus was born in Hong Kong around the year 2000.

What would it look like for him to be human? Well, I guess he has to go to school, right? And do lots of homework and learn Chinese characters. And he lives in a small apartment in Mong Kok with, you know, with Joseph and Mary and his four little brothers. And what does he do? They celebrate the winter solstice together. And he does his chores. And again, he does lots of exams. And then, of course, later, he goes to uni. And then after that, he gets a job somewhere, you know, on the island. So he gets on the MTR in his suit. And he goes to an office. And he works long hours sending emails and doing spreadsheets. I don't know. How do you feel about that? This is almighty God. And he comes and lives that kind of life. Right? An ordinary human life. Now, I think you think that's crazy, right?

You probably think, what a waste of time. I mean, age 30, he quit his job and became a preacher, right? That's, OK, that's the real thing. I think that says we have a very low view of our own life, right? If we think that's a waste of time, do we think our life is a waste of time, right? You know, you have a job. You need to have a job because then you can earn money and buy food and pay rent. But actually, it's not that important, right? Or just being at home with your family and doing chores. Well, yeah, I guess it's now Christmas holiday. You can get a bit of celebration.

But maybe we think our ordinary human life isn't actually that special. Well, today will be a very interesting passage. We're going to see that our lives are part of something much bigger. And I hope today will be a real encouragement to us. Now, what are we looking at today? We're doing this series, Why Jesus Came. And one thing is, Jesus came to restore God's kingdom.

[7 : 35] To restore God's kingdom. Now, maybe heard in the reading, the word kingdom, right? Here are four kingdoms from the sea. And the Son of Man received the kingdom and the saints received the kingdom.

I hope you've heard the kingdom language in this passage. But what is the kingdom of God? Right? If you ask different Christians, many people, how do you define the kingdom of God?

They come up with all kinds of things. I mean, maybe it is that God is the king, that God is in charge and rules over everything. Well, maybe. But before Jesus came, God was also in charge. So that's not just it, right? And there must be more than that. Maybe it is that Jesus is now our king rather than God the Father. Is that it? Sometimes people think, okay, the kingdom is, you know, the kingdom of heaven. It's when there's no suffering and there's joy. And Jesus came to bring the kingdom of God, well, later. Or sometimes people think, well, the kingdom of God is about justice and righteousness.

So when people do good in the world and there's, you know, there's justice and compassion. And that's the kingdom of God. Well, there's some truth in every one of those. But how do they all fit together?

Well, what is the kingdom of God? Well, to see that, we need to just go back to the beginning of the Bible. So actually, we're going to start on page one of your Bibles in Genesis chapter one. So if you have a Bible, turn to chapter one of Genesis, the first book, page one.

[9 : 00] It's not the first page. There's all these introductory pages, but you know what I mean. And then what do we see here? Well, we see a failed kingdom. The world starts with, the book starts with a failed kingdom. Now, of course, we need to start with actually before the failed kingdom, what was God's original design? How do we see the kingdom here? Well, let's look at human beings and what we were supposed to be. Genesis 1 verse 26, the creation of mankind, humanity. Then God said, verse 26, let us make man in our image after our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. Now, what are humans here?

They are in the image of God. They are a copy of God, right? Like your, you know, your WhatsApp profile picture. It's a copy of who you are, a copy of God. And how are we a copy? Well, it says, let them have dominion, right? So, of course, God is the supreme king over everything. And human beings, they were copied. They are rulers in his place, right? We are stewards of creation. We're supposed to rule the world under God. I don't know what you, I mean, that's quite common. Psalm 8, one slide back, right? That's celebrated. What an honor that is. That's, so here is David praising God. What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You've made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowns him with glory and honor. You've given him

dominion over the works of your hands. You've put all things under his feet. Hey, here's a, this is humanity. We are under God, a little bit lower, and we were supposed to rule over the world. I don't know what you think ruling is. You know, do we sit on a throne? Are we like, let's go, we're in a building and we vote on laws or something like that? No, it's our ordinary lives. Just our work, our, you know, families, just normal, ordinary life, but God's way, right? God is the God of love and compassion and mercy and justice.

And when we live our lives that way, well, creation flourishes. That was supposed to be the beautiful world that God made where we, you know, we, we rule over the world God's way. And yeah, it would be beautiful. And that, that is the kingdom of God, the original design. But of course, as we have heard many times in Christmas, in Genesis 3, that design was broken. Adam and Eve sinned, right? They, they, they rejected God's rule. They rebelled. They went our own way. Now, what happened in there is that the kingdom was thrown upside down. The kingdom of God was thrown upside down. If you think about the kingdom, it's, right? You have God on top, and then we are kind of under God, and then creation underneath, right? That's kind of the hierarchy in Genesis 1 and 2. But, all right, Adam and Eve listened to Satan. But how is Satan presented here? Look at 3 verse 1, right? So how is Satan presented? In 3 verse 1, now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field.

So Satan is here presented as a beast, an animal. And Adam and Eve listened to the beast, right? And so it's like animals are now on top, creation's on top, and then man underneath, and then God is kind of ignored, right? So it's like, you know, creation is thrown upside down. The kingdom is, is thrown upside down. That is what we see here. It's no longer the kingdom of God. It's no longer God's way. It's now, you know, people live our way. We live Satan's way. That's what happened to the world. And this imagery of beast ruling, yeah, you see that all throughout the Bible. So we had that weird reading from Daniel talking about the kingdoms of the world, but how were they presented as beasts, right? Here are beasts that rule, I mean, very scary predators, right? Very weird. You know, they're trying to make a picture. It's just, it's just weird, but it's scary, right? Because here are beasts that rule. Humans would live God's way with mercy and compassion, but beasts, they don't know God. They just rule their own way. That is what the world is like. It's people ruling their own way, living their own way. It's like animals are in charge, and it's horrible, right? That is the world. And yeah, that is the world we live in now, a world ruled by beasts, right? That's what we are like. We're no longer human in a way. And yeah, that's the aspect of sin. In other ways also, creation is kind of on top. So how is Adam punished? How are they punished? Well, creation almost rebels against them, right? They rebel against God, and now creation rebels against them because there's natural disasters, and work is hard, and right? Creation is now, we are being ruled by creation. It's just a mess. It's a great explanation of our world, right? Humans who rebel, creation that rebels. And just to say before we move on, it's quite a humbling picture of who we are, right? We are, as humans, we are rebels. Now Christmas, we often focus on us as victims, right? We're in the dark, and we need the light. And we, you know, we're in bondage, and we need freedom. And that's absolutely true. That's absolutely wonderful. But we shouldn't forget that the mess we're in is the mess of our own making.

We are rebels, right? We have turned God's kingdom upside down. And yeah, and of course, because of our position, that really matters, right? Sin is not just you and God, right?

[15 : 10] Because we are supposed to rule over creation. When we sin, all of creation is messed up, right? I mean, the higher someone is, the more impact they have. So a little four-year-old who sins, no one gets hurt, apart from their younger sister, right? If you have some president somewhere up there who sins, millions of people get hurt, right? The higher you are, you know, the more damage you do. And of course, we are a little lower than God, right? We rule over creation. So when we sin, all of creation is affected, right? Our rebellion is a big thing.

God cares about it. We're not just victims. We're rebels. We ruined God's kingdom. And it's right that God does something about that, right? I don't know if you see your sin that way.

We should see it as more serious than we often think. But yeah, God didn't leave his kingdom in a mess. The good news of Christmas, of course, is that there is a new king. We are getting a new king. And that's already in Genesis 3, right? Already in the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve sinned, God promised, yeah, the gospel for the first time. So 3 verse 15, if you're still in Genesis, Genesis, the famous verse, we looked at it every week already. But to the woman, God said, I will show, no, no, sorry, verse 15, God spoke to the serpent, I will put enmity between you and the

[27 : 06] Let me read those verses, and then we're going to draw them out. Right? 917. And he, God, put all things under his feet, Jesus' feet, and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

And you can hear everything under his feet, right? This is a new humanity. This is, right? Yeah, Psalm 8. But what does this picture say? Well, here's my drawing of it, all things, and then under Jesus' feet, right?

You can see that. Everything is under his feet. And then, okay, where's Jesus? Well, Christ is the head over everything. So there's Christ. But where are you?

Well, verse 23, right? The church, which is his body. There's where you are. You are part of Christ. You are, this new humanity is Christ, but not just Christ himself, but those who are in Christ.

That's where the church is. You are this new humanity. So this new human race, it doesn't spread through genes, it doesn't spread through having children, just unless they believe, but it spreads as people submit to Jesus and come under his rule.

[28 : 25] And then, that is this picture. The church is the new humanity in Christ. It's worth noting, of course, that this means the kingdom starts with belonging to Jesus, right?

So people who, you know, here's a secular organization, and they do mercy and compassion. That's wonderful. That's not the kingdom of God, because it's not under Jesus, right? It's not in submission to Jesus.

It also means, by the way, that if you're not a Christian, it's great that you're here. You need to become part of this by coming to Jesus. By nature, we're all part of that old humanity that's going to be cut away.

But if you surrender, if you come to Jesus, you know, Jesus loves you, he forgives you, he welcomes you back. Come and be part of this new humanity. But you need to turn. You're not automatically part of it.

But, yeah, this is where, but this is the body of Christ. This is, right? Because head and body is not just about closeness and intimacy.

[29 : 26] Bodies do something, right? So if I send an email, that's not just my head. I use my body, right? That's how we work. We work with our bodies. Our head controls our bodies, and our bodies do the work.

And so if we are the body of Christ, we, you know, we are the new humanity. We live our ordinary lives in this world, and that is how Christ is at work, right? Can you see that?

That's our new humanity. That's what Christmas leads to. Jesus became a human, leading to a new humanity, and that's those who are in Christ, Christ's body. Now, when is this?

Of course, partly in the new creation, when there's no more sin, and we are all truly human, and without sin anymore, of course, then we'll take care of the universe under Christ. But it's here now in some way as well.

Right? Daniel chapter 2 talks about, yeah, again, God's kingdom, but it's like a stone that grows and covers the whole earth. Right? It's about, you know, the new humanity growing right now.

[30 : 26] Ephesians, it doesn't just say this happened, but it's, you know, live a life worthy of your calling. Live out this new humanity as a new, yeah, as new humans, as a new Adam.

Right? So, yeah, it's not just trust, being a Christian, therefore, it's not just trusting in Jesus. It's not just, that's how it starts. Right? But it's not just, okay, I read my Bible and pray, and for the rest, I live my old life.

No, we are a new humanity here in this world. I mean, I thought of this meme from a few years ago, from COVID.

I don't know if you remember this one. Right? That's 2019, this guy lying on the couch, he's a lazy guy. 2020, he's a responsible adult. Right? So just wait at home until, you know, the vaccine rescues us.

Right? That was kind of the thing back then. Sometimes as Christians, we can say like that, right? Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel.

[31 : 24] Right? We are, we're captive and we just need to wait for Jesus to come. Right? We are in the dark and we wait for Jesus to come. And being a Christian is just, okay, you believe in Jesus and then you wait.

Right? Is this a faithful Christian? Well, no. Christmas says actually our lives matter. Partly, of course, we need to share the gospel before Jesus returns.

But more, we are the new humanity. We are filled with the spirit. Right? And so, live that out. Human matter. Humans matter. Our lives matter.

Right? If we live God's way, if we live ordinary lives but beautifully with love and compassion and according to God's words, yeah, this is God's kingdom restored.

Humans living God's way under God. And it's a beautiful thought. Right? We are, of course, partly we are victims. I don't want to deny that. And for many of us, life is tough and we're struggling.

[32 : 23] But at the same time, we're something new. God is at work already. And we can live that out. Right? So when you go to work tomorrow, maybe you're on your break, maybe when you go to work soon, yeah, think of yourself like that.

You're an agent of God's kingdom. God's given you a role there to live out your life, to reflect Christ. And that's why Jesus came, to restore God's kingdom. He is the new Adam, starting a new humanity.

And if we are in him, well, we are to live that out. And that's a wonderful, beautiful thing. Right? And that the world will flourish. We will flourish. We are who we're meant to be. It's a wonderful thing.

Well, why don't I pray as we reflect on that, as we do that, the music team and the communion stewards can come to the front. Father, thank you for what Jesus did.

Thank you that he lived a perfect life for all those years. The life that we could never live. The life where we fell so far short of your glory. And yet, he lived that perfectly.

[33 : 38] And he lived that for us. He won the kingdom. He gave that to us. He included us. Help us to be thankful and joyful this Christmas. And Lord, would it change who we are?

Would it change how we see ourselves? That we are now part of the body of Christ. Part of this new humanity. We know humans are important. Would we see that and live that out?

Out of grace. Not because of we have to become something, but because of who we already are in Christ. So give us joy and meaning this Christmas.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.