

Sermon—January 15-16, 2000
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Preparing for the New Millennium Series
Daniel 7

Why is Life so Crazy?

Let me begin with a little plug for the 30-Days to Understanding the Bible that we are trying to urge our entire church family to pick up and go through in the next month or so. We have sold nearly 2000 copies of this book and we are selling them at cost here. Someone just recently told me that their mother is seventy seven years old and just became a Christian in the last few months. She said, “I don’t know the Bible very well. It is very hard to know where to begin.” She said, “This book is perfect for folks who really don’t know their way around the Bible.” So whether you are a teenager or you are in your eighties, if you don’t feel that you really have a great handle on the whole sweep of Bible geography and history and how the storyline of the Bible works its way through from creation all the way through to the book of Revelations, then you need to pick this book up. I will tell you that I picked some things up from this book, and I have been a student of the Bible for the last 25 years. So I think you might pick up something as well. In fact, we are going to be going through this book in all of our small groups. We want to take five to ten minutes in each small group meeting to encourage people in their reading; maybe highlight a few things at the beginning of our small group meetings over the next month and a half. So, leaders – women’s and men’s group leaders, kinship leaders, urge

people in your groups to get the book so that you can take a few minutes to look at together on top of whatever else you are doing.

sermon

Pick up a newspaper on any given day and you are going to have a chronicle of yesterday's craziness in the world. Just recently there was a major story about the sentencing of a thirteen year old. Apparently, when this boy was eleven he murdered another child. How do we comprehend an eleven year old committing murder? Or a teenager who broke into the home of a seventy five year old grandmother and raped her?

It is just crazy stuff. Why would suburban kids who have everything materially break into a local school and wreak havoc on the school spray painting profanities all over, shoot off fire extinguishers in the hallways and smash computer screens? Why would some suburban kids commit random acts of vandalism and destruction?

There was a story in the paper just the other day about a mother who decided that she was tired of raising her kids and so she took off. She told the kids who were all in elementary school that she was going to turn them all over to foster parents. Apparently, she needed to move on with her life.

What is at the root of all the craziness? You discover a friend who is having a long term affair with another friend. And then there is the man who walks away from his children

without any sense of guilt about missing child support payments on a regular basis, never calls and never visits.

I don't understand the craziness of life and in particular the tendency toward evil, toward corruption. What is going on when in America, which is one of the world's most religious nations, we have a higher percentage of church-goers in the US than almost any other country in the world, and yet we are the biggest purveyor of pornography? We just spew pornography around the world. Many, many Muslim nations believe that America, which they consider to be a Christian nation, is really just a moral sewer which is polluting their countries with our moral sewage. How do we explain why church-goers around the US are massively addicted to pornography or, despite all kinds of warnings and prohibitions coming from the pulpits, are regularly sleeping with their boyfriends and girlfriends and not repenting?

I am currently reading a fascinating book by a man named Ron Rosenbaum called "Explaining Hitler." Since the war ended, and actually even before the war ended during Hitler's rise to power in the 20s and 30's, there has been literally an endless array of theories offered to explain Hitler's unique and frightening brand of evil. The book, "Explaining Hitler," tells us not just about Hitler, but about the way that modern culture goes about trying to interpret the crazy things, the wicked things, the corrupt, the evil things in the world. You have all the psycho-analytical views of Hitler by an army of psychiatrists and psychologists. Some people have said that Hitler's evil and cruelty can be found in his relationship with his distant and cold father or his relationship with his

domineering and smothering mother. Or in his fear that he was tainted with Jewish blood through his grandfather, which led to a self hatred and self loathing. Or perhaps his hostility to Jews was rooted in his thwarted love affair with his niece, who he feared was taking up with a Jewish music teacher. All of these attempts to enter the psyche of Hitler through some family of origin issue.

Of course, the sexual component to Hitler's wickedness has been endlessly written about as well. That he was involved in some kind of unnatural sexuality. Or that he had some sort of deformity. Or that he suffered from a sexually transmitted disease. There was a twist in his sexuality.

Some folks have attempted to say that much of Hitler's philosophy was actually an American import. It is clear, historically, that Hitler at the beginning was financed by our own Henry Ford, who was a notorious anti-Semite and who gave millions of dollars to publish anti-Semitic tracts and just the most scurrilous and slanderous accusations against Jews. Henry Ford was one of the original bankrollers of Hitler.

Others have said that there is no foreign link at all. And in a recent bomb shell of a book called "Hitler's Willing Executioners" by Daniel Goldhagen, Goldhagen suggests that Hitler was really just a tool used by the German people to carry out what was already in their hearts. His perspective was that Hitler was actually not an actor or an initiator, but a puppet carrying out the centuries long anti-Semitism that is rooted in the very soil of

Germany. As you can imagine, this is quite a controversial book, especially in Germany now.

How do we explain Hitler? Some have opted for a spiritual explanation. That Hitler was heavily involved in the occult. Some have blamed God. Some say that there is no such thing as evil, at least in so far as great acts of wickedness. Rather what we are faced with continually is what one writer called “the banality of evil.” That the Holocaust is a product of indifference, not great evil, but indifference. Thousands of thousands of bureaucrats carrying out their little part, firing their papers, driving their trains and then going home and having a beer with their friends without care, without guilt.

Daniel 7 pulls the curtains back on the craziness that we see in the world and begins to offer some degree of explanation for the evil that we see and, in fact, for massive eruptions of evil. Now, I must warn you that no one – not me, not any writer, not any speaker – is going to be able to give you an exhaustive explanation of what the Bible calls the “mystery of iniquity.” There is a profound mystery, an unsolvable, unfathomable mystery that always causes us to scratch our heads as we look at corruption and perversion and violence. But Daniel 7 offers us, at least, a beginning toward an explanation. It gives us an approach that we can take toward the craziness of life – a lens in which we can begin to explain. I have called life’s talk, “Why is Life so Crazy.” Let’s pray.

Let’s begin by reading Daniel 7:1 –

“In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream.”

There is a major shift that takes place at this point in the book of Daniel from Daniel chapters 1-6 to Daniel chapters 7-12. In time, this dream that Daniel has in Daniel 7 actually takes place before the events of chapter 5. So we have been following along chronologically from the beginning of Daniel 1 through Daniel 6 and we have seen the progression of Babylonian kings – Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar and the fall of Belshazzar to the Persians; the rise of Darius the Persian king. But now we are going back in time to the first year of Belshazzar’s reign.

The major shift isn’t just one of time. The shift that is most evident is the type of writing. For six chapters we have what we might call historical narrative – a pretty straight forward telling of events. But we move to a very different kind of writing style in chapters 7-12 – a type of writing that scholars have labeled “apocalyptic”. The word apocalyptic comes from the Greek word “apokalypsis” which means revelation, a drawing back of the curtain.

Now let me give you some of the main features of apocalyptic writing because the rest of Daniel is a prime example of apocalyptic writing. You see the same thing in the book of Revelation – the apocalypse of St. John. We see the same kind of writing in the book of Zechariah. One major theme of apocalyptic writing is the theme of evil and doom.

When people talk about facing the apocalypse they are often talking about facing a major catastrophe, like nuclear war, the explosion of the hydrogen bomb, the next world war.

Now unlike secular apocalypses, biblical apocalypses have in them a sense of hope. It is not just evil and doom, but woven into the fabric of the biblical apocalypse would be a sense of hope, a sense of ultimate victory, a looking forward to a time when corruption and evil will end, when God's enemies will be triumphed over. Biblical apocalypse always has the thought in mind that in the end God wins and we win.

But what else might we see in the apocalyptic in the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation? Well, certainly we see a movement from the present to the future. Daniel is going to talk to us about events that are not just going on in his own day, but events that will occur at some future points – hundreds of years in the future or sometimes thousands of years in the future. And because apocalypse means revelation, the lifting of the curtain, the pulling back of the veil, the displaying what was hidden, what we often are seeing is not only the moving of the present from the present to the future, but a movement from the merely human plane to the supernatural plane.

We are going behind the scenes. We are going to find that behind the Hitler and the Stalin and the Chairman Mao is a supernatural evil. Apocalyptic is always looking at the supernatural forces that is energizing the events in world history. We move from the present to the future. We move from the natural plane to the supernatural plane. And most importantly we move from the literal to the symbolic, to a world rich in metaphors

and symbols and dream like numbers. We are going to be moving into a very strange world, this apocalyptic world – a world inhabited by these weird hybrid animals and symbolic numbers.

Now when we deal with the apocalyptic the book of Revelation, the end of the book of Daniel, we always have to be careful that we don't press all of the details or get too literal in our approaches and in our understanding. We are talking about things that are beyond understanding. We are talking about pictures and metaphors and analogies. And the problem of people, over and over again in the history of the world, is that they have tried to get too precise, too literal. What you end up with is the idea that some author has discovered the key or the road map to the future of the world ala Hal Lindsay and The Late Great Planet Earth. Has it ever occurred to you that if God intended to give us a precise road map to the future of the world so that we would look in our daily newspaper and immediately jump to a verse in the Bible and say, "There it is. This recent deal between Israel and Syria is prophesied about right here in the book of Daniel."

Or "The assassination of this Yitzhak Rabin the Israeli Prime Minister or that Egyptian prime minister is actually prophesied about right here."

Or "This particular nation is clearly Russia or clearly China or clearly the Arab nations or clearly the US."

Or "This refers to a super computer."

Or “This bird of prey is Saddam Hussein.”

Has it ever occurred to you that if God intended to give us a detailed road map to the future, which we would know with certainty the events that would be transpiring in the future, he sure made the road map hard to follow? God is very smart and he is a really great writer and when God wants to be straight forward about information, he has no problem in being straight forward. He is quite capable of saying things like, “I hate divorce,” which he says in the book of Malachi. He is quite clear about what he wants of us. I mean the Ten Commandments are not really ambiguous. “Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not kill. Do not commit adultery.” I mean this isn’t tough stuff to interpret. When God wishes to be crystal clear about a matter, for example what he requires of us, what he hates, or the way that a person can enter a relationship with God, he tells us very plainly that the way to come to him is through his son, Jesus. Jesus says, “I am the Way. I am the Truth. I am the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me.” Straight forward stuff. You can’t come to God the Father except through Jesus.

But when it comes to certain future events, not all, many future events are written with crystal clarity. It is written with crystal clarity that Jesus will not return until the gospel message is preached to all nations. It is written with crystal clarity, at least in my mind, that Jesus will not return until you see a mass conversion of Jewish people. You might look at Romans 11:12 and Romans 11:25-26 regarding that. It is written with crystal clarity that before Christ returns there is going to be a great rebellion and a man of lawlessness, an Antichrist, will arise.

But in precisely who that person is and the details surrounding the coming of the Lord, we see a great deal of ambiguity. These things are shrouded in mystery. It is apparent, to me at least, that God does not wish for us to know everything about world events with clarity. It is apparent to me, at least, that God does not wish us to know the future with a detailed road map. He gives us the outlines. He gives us the shadows on the wall. He wants to invoke in us not endless speculation or certainty as we publish our books and preach over the radio – this scripture, if fulfilled by that event. He wants believers to live in dependency upon him, in humility with open questions, a cautiousness about saying too much.

And you can always draw a crowd with being certain about what is going on in world events and discovering strange and hidden meanings of things. You can always draw a crowd. You can pack a church. But perhaps there are some things that God doesn't want us to be completely certain about. He wants us to be certain our relationship with him and certain about holiness and certain about his return. But some things we have to hold with a loose hand. I just want to encourage you to never get caught up in the hysteria that can be whipped up in times of stress and don't waste your time listening to silly speculations or your money on books where the author tells you that they have it all figured out. Don't waste your time or your money on such nonsense.

There are some things profound confusing and troubling. They are hard to get a handle on. But that keeps us dependent upon the Lord as opposed to dependent upon our ability to figure everything out.

Daniel 7:2-7

Daniel said, “In my vision at night I looked and there before were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a man, and the heart of a man was given to it. And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, ‘Get up and eat your fill of flesh.’ After that, I looked and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule. After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.”

We are plunged into a world of weird hybrid beasts – a lion with the wings of an eagle; a bear with ribs in its mouth; a leopard with wings of a bird; an animal that I would call robo-beast in v. 8. It has iron teeth and looks like it has come out of a recent sci-fi movie or some B-rated Japanese movie. It is tromping down and all these people are running.

Let's set the scene. It says in v. 2, "In my vision at night I looked and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts, each different from the others, came out of the sea."

Now it was very common in the ancient near East to view the sea as a symbol of chaos and destructive evil. The sea is a picture of that which is always trying to break boundaries. In the ancient near East, the sea was the equivalent of chaos, so whenever there is going to be destruction and chaos let loose on the world, it is going to come from the sea.

Now, if anything characterizes modern life it is the feeling of chaos, the feeling of craziness, the sense that life is out of control, that no one is calling the shots – chaos. We experience that when we look out and see random violence where for no reason at all kids walk into their middle school or high schools and pull a gun and start shooting people. Random violence for no reason at all. You hear about someone going to their place of employment, their office, the factory floor, the post office and they pull out a gun and start shooting their former supervisor, coworkers or customers who have just wandered in. If there is a word that characterizes life in the modern world, it is the word "chaos."

It seems like relationships are chaotic. People make partial commitments. They live together for a little while and then for some unknown reason they grow apart and the guy moves out; people get married and fall out of love; family life is highly chaotic. Everyone is running in a different direction. Fewer and fewer families have family meals together.

Almost no family has family prayer together on a regular basis. Kids are involved in four after school activities. We don't even get down time in traveling to work anymore. People are receiving emails in their cars. They are searching the net on their cell phones. What we read continually in the Bible and what Daniel is getting at is that chaos is a feature of life in this world. That is why he starts off with beasts coming from the sea. Life in this world, since the fall, is crazy or it appears to be crazy. And it is often experienced as random, as confusing, as meaningless. But what we read continually in the Bible is that God rules over the chaos. That God triumphs over the forces in the sea. That he destroys the sea monsters and can destroy the sense of chaos in your life.

Let's move on. He has a vision of four great beasts. These are mutant beasts. They are out of some sci-fi novel or a horror film. They are parts of animals thrown together. A lion with the wings of an eagle; a leopard with bird's wings. We are talking about the realm of symbolism and very often we use animals as symbols of nations. As we are going to find out that Daniel is doing here, these are symbols of nations. We do the same thing today. Thus, we use the eagle as a symbol of the US; the bear as a symbol of Russia; the dragon as a symbol of China. Fortunately, Ben Franklin's suggestion that the turkey be used for a symbol for the US was never accepted. It is kind of embarrassing, you know, to have a turkey as your national symbol or a French poodle. There are some animals that you just don't want to have represent your whole country and a turkey is certainly one of them.

But even today, even in our distancing from nature, we still speak of animals metaphorically. Do you know what it means when you call someone a skunk or rat? How does it seem when I call someone, “You old fox. You sly dog.” You communicate something of their ability to manipulate things to their own advantage. Does anyone not know what it means to live like a pig or to eat like a horse? It is not a compliment when a woman is called a cow or a man is called an old goat.

These hybrid animals in the book of Daniel are meant to create in the hearer a feeling of revulsion, a sense of horror, because these animals are unnatural. Jews understood that in Genesis 1 God created the animals according to their kinds. The species were not mixed up together. The Jews always kept things separate and ordered.

Here this is disorder. These animals are going to bring chaos. And you see that they are going to bring in their wake destruction. These animals are animals of prey. They are like the lion, the eagle, the bear, the leopard.

We understand that these four mutant animals represent four successive kingdoms – that is what we read in Dan. 7:15, “I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit. The visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. I approached one of those sitting there and asked him the true meaning of all of this and so he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things. The four great beasts are four great kingdoms that will rise from the earth.”

So these four mutant beasts are deliberately unnamed. It wouldn't have taken anything for God to name them for us, if he wanted us to have absolute road maps. I think this is

meant to represent the history of the world, that we continually live the time of the fourth beast that tramples its victims. I happen to believe that in his immediate context, Daniel was not speaking about first Babylon, then Media-Persia, then Greece, and the fourth beast being Rome. I know that is what a lot of conservative Christians will say. I know that is what the NIV Study Bible says.

But looking at the context of Daniel as a whole, I think the fourth beast is most probably ancient Greece, not ancient Rome, and therefore, if you were to run through the four kingdoms, the four beasts, you would have first Babylon, then Media, then Persia, and then ancient Greece. The reason why I think that this is probably ancient Greece is because of what follows that this beast had ten horns and, “while I was thinking about the horns before me, was another horn, a little one, which came up among them and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully.” From this fourth beast arises this little horn, which speaks boastfully. This last kingdom, in other words, spawns many offspring, including this eleventh horn.

Now, again, we are dealing with biblical symbolism. The horn in the Bible is a symbol of power or status. Animals’ horns are indicative of animal’s power or status or health. So by analogy, the biblical writers when they would use the word horn they were talking about power – political power, economic power. The lamb in the book of Revelation has seven horns that symbolize perfect kingly power.

Well, here this horn follows the uprooting of three other horns. So this horn, kingly power, follows the uprooting of the other kings. What do we read about this eleventh horn, this little one? It says, “It has the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully.” V. 19 tells us more about this eleventh king. It says, “Then I wanted you to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws—the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. I wanted you to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell—the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully.”

So we see that it is a very arrogant king. “As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgments in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.”

What else do we read about this boastful little king who wars against God’s people? We read in v. 24, “The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and a half time.”

The features of this eleventh king are arrogance, warring against the saints, blasphemy and an attempt to change the laws of God. And he is going to have this control for three and a half years – a time, two times and a half a time – 3½ years. Who are they talking about? Well, if you read on in the Book of Daniel, you see that Daniel refers to this arrogant little king in Daniel 9:27 where it says, “He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven’ but in the middle of that seven he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And one who causes desolation will place abominations on a wing of the temple until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.” This king is responsible for abomination and desolation.

And then he is spoken about in great detail, this king, in Daniel 11:21-31, especially v. 31 where we read, “His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. With flattery you will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.”

Finally, in Daniel 12, we read “From the time the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.”

What is Daniel talking about by this little horn, this eleventh king that is blaspheming and warring against God’s people, ending the sacrifices, setting up an abomination that causes

desolation. As you read all of the text from Daniel 7-12, he is probably talking about an historic person named Antiochus IV Epiphanies.

Antiochus was a Greek king whose career is described in great detail in Daniel 11:21-35. He was returning from a military campaign in Egypt when he decided to storm the city of Jerusalem. And there in 167 BC Antiochus killed thousands of Jews. He sold thousands more into slavery. And he entered the Temple. In the Temple Antiochus desecrated the Temple. He committed an abomination in the Jewish Holy Temple by going into the Holy of Holies and erecting a statue of the Greek God Zeus and sacrificing a pig on the altar of the Temple. He also commanded Jews to depart from the Law of God or else face the penalty of death. He attempted to wipe out Judaism and put in its place Greek pagan religion.

A boastful little king – blaspheming against God, taking over his Temple, desecrating it, making it a filthy place. Antiochus' desecration of the Temple lasted for a time two times and a half a time. It lasted about 3½ years and then the Jews led by one Judah Macabee revolted against the Greeks. This was called the Macabean Revolt and is written about in the Jewish book called First Macabees. That book, by the way, is found in Catholic bibles. The revolt was successful. They threw the Greeks out of Judea. Antiochus had to flee. Upon hearing of the Greek army's defeat, Antiochus went insane and died and the Jews came and cleansed the Temple and rededicated it to the God of the Jews, Yahweh. Year after year for the 2000 years, Jews have celebrated the defeat of

Antiochus, the boastful little king, and the rededication of the Jewish Temple by the holiday Hanukah.

Why do I tell you all of this? Because Antiochus, this eleventh horn, is a type, a paradigm for blasphemous evil kings throughout the history of the earth. So Paul uses Antiochus as a type when he talks about the man of lawlessness who will take his seat in the Temple. He is talking about the Roman king who will come in his day and enter the Temple. But he is also talking about an end time king who will come. Antiochus serves as a type of the end time Antichrist that John refers to in the book of Revelation, Rev. 13.

Whenever you see a leader, a governmental leader, who is arrogant and boastful, whenever you see a governmental leader who blasphemes God, whenever you see a governmental leader who declares war on God's people and oppresses God's people, his decrees and laws, limiting people's freedom to worship God and to serve him, whenever you see an immoral leader, a leader who tries to turn people's worship away from God and toward themselves, then you see a type of Antiochus, and there you see the seeds of the beast. Throughout history, people have tried to identify Antichrist.

Perhaps he is here in ancient Rome and his name is Nero. He is crucifying Christians and blaspheming against God. Or in ancient Rome his name is Domitian. He is pouring out horrible violence against Christians in 90 AD. Perhaps it is Mohammed who persecuted Christians in the 7th Century AD. Or perhaps it was Napoleon, as many people believed.

Or perhaps it is Stalin or Hitler or Chairman Mao. Were people wrong in identifying these various people throughout history as Antichrist?

Well, yes and no. They were wrong if they were meaning that this person was the final end time figure that John is writing about in the book of Revelation, or that Paul is talking about and referring to in 2 Thessalonians 2. They are wrong if they said they were the final end time figure, the embodiment of all evil who will bring in the massive last great tribulation on the world. But they weren't wrong in seeing in these people the spirit of Antichrist. They weren't wrong if they saw in these persons a figure like Antiochus, who polluted the Temple; a figure like the Roman Emperor who polluted Herod's Temple. We are not wrong if we say that we see seeds of the beast in many wicked leaders and in every evil nation. We just don't want to say this is that in its final fulfillment.

Christians living in Nazi Germany and Jews in Nazi Germany experienced the spirit of Antichrist through Hitler. That is what was behind him. It was no wonder they said, "Here is Antichrist."

We always need to be appropriately careful in our identification in saying, "This is the final, ultimate end times Antichrist." God gives us no precise road map; he just gives us a general description, a picture, that hits many people throughout history.

Are some times in history worse than others? Yes. Some times in history we see the rise of these boastful little kings. Some times in history we see the outpouring the immorality

and moral filth. I believe that we in America in this new millennium are living with great moral erosion. The Christian church is wracked with broken sexuality. As a pastor I can tell you with real grief that there is real brokenness within this church.

The seeds of the beast are present here in America and there is war being declared on the saints. We see the seeds of the beast in the promotion of violent defense offered for the right to abort babies. We see the seeds of the beast in our rampant materialism and profound greed in the face of great human need around us. When people from other nations come to the US, what they don't experience is a Christian nation. Their immediate impression of America, which is a worldwide impression, is that we are a very greedy and selfish nation. That is the viewpoint of visitors to the US. We like to think of our selves as a giving, selfless, sacrificial nation, but that is not the impression of most visitors to this country. They don't see our spirituality.

So is it just doom and despair – these from the seed, the eleventh horn, the Antichrist? Well, Daniel has another vision. In v. 9 we read, “As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.” Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its

body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.”

In v. 26, “The court will sit, and his power [that is the power of this little horn] will be taken away and completely destroyed forever and ever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.”

Evil kingdoms are described as these mutant animals. But Daniel looks up into heaven and he has a vision of the divine realm. We must not think when he uses the term “ancient of days” or his hair was “white like wool” that God looks like an old man. This is symbol, this is metaphor. God’s white hair communicates God’s wisdom. He had the hair of the aged who in the ancient world were considered wise. His clothing, which was white as snow, symbolized God’s righteousness. He is clothed with purity. His throne flaming with fire and his wheels ablaze, a river of fire flowing from him is a symbol of God’s power in judgment. God often appears in fire. Fire is often associated with God. He appears in a burning bush to Moses. Fire comes out on Mt. Sinai. Everything around him is ablaze – his throne, his angelic servants are called flames of fire before a sea of glass mingled with fire. There are streams of fire flowing out. This is a picture of God’s wrath, burning white hot, against his enemies.

But the main thing Daniel wants us to see is that God is seated on the throne. That he is sovereign and that “one like the Son of man” [he is talking about Messiah Jesus] was

given authority, glory and sovereign power. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away. His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. Daniel wants us to see most of all that despite the beasts that trampled on the earth, and despite the boastfulness of little kings, that blasphemy against God and war against the saints, Almighty God and God's Son have it firmly in control.

This is really important because in a world that we experience as chaos, God is actually unfolding a plan. There is a point to life. It may look like random threads to you and to me and craziness, but there is a destiny, a flow to your life, a flow to human history. Everything is working out according to God's predetermined plan. We are caught in the flow. And it is really important that you be seized by a conviction that your life does have a destiny, that God does have a plan for you, that what is happening in your life is not purposeless and random. God has plans for your life.

God is in control of all that exists. He is in control of the natural world. Job 26 says, "He spreads out the northern skies over empty space. He spins the earth over nothing. He wraps up the waters and clouds by his breath the skies become fair."

God is not only in control of the natural world, God is in control of the spiritual world. He rules over every spirit, whether angels or demons. Psalm 103:31 says, "Praise the Lord all his heavenly hosts, you servants who do his will." Angels do the will of God. Every spirit, good and bad, is subject to the rule of Christ. That is what Colossians 2:10

says when it says, “You have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.”

1 Peter 3 says, “Christ has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand with angels’ authority and powers and submission to him.”

The spiritual world is completely ruled by Christ.

The flow of history is completely ruled by Christ. The events of history, the unfolding the beast, are all ruled by Christ. Every nation on earth is under the rule of Christ. When you see the rise of nations and the fall of nations, it is due to the rule of God. Daniel 2:20 says, “Praise be to the name of God forever and ever. Wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons. He sets up kings and deposes them.”

There is no area of life where God is not ultimately in control – even over the world of evil, the world of suffering. There is no area of life where you could say, “There God wasn’t in control.” God is in control of all that has come to past.

I am not saying that this makes tragedy easy to bear. Or that we can completely comprehend and can explain Hitler or crazy violence. There is deep mystery in inequity that no man can plumb. Ecclesiastes says, “There is a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to embrace and a time to be silent.” Moments of tragedy are times to embrace and weep and be silent. People do not need our glib and easy explanations.

But over everything is the ancient of days, seated on the throne, ruling in perfect calmness, with perfect wisdom. Over everything is the Son of Man who has been given sovereignty and authority and glory and whose kingdom, unlike kingdoms of ancient Greece or Rome or Persia, or the modern kingdoms of England, Russia or the US, the Son of Man's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and it will never pass away.

So—what does all of this mean for the way we live? Let me tie all of these threads together quickly. First of all, we need to live balanced lives. Because God is in control, we aren't pessimistic or fatalistic about the future. We don't walk around with a sense of doom or depression or discouragement. We Christians are full of hope and full of joy because God ultimately will win, even when life is crazy or terrible. God will win and he will share the victory with us.

And we are not Pollyannaish going around saying "everything is just great. I can lay back and no one will sow weeds in my garden." The fact is that there are beasts at work at all times and seeds of the beast being sown. God knows there are seeds of the beast being sown. We don't misinterpret the control of God and say, "Well, I don't need to look into what my kids are being taught at school. I am sure everything is just fine."

"I don't need to inquire where my kids are going. I will just give them the car keys and assume everything is OK"

“I don’t need to set limits on who they go with or what they wear, what they listen to or watch. After all, God is in control, so it will all be OK.”

Because there are seeds of the beast constantly being sown. What that means is that we have an appropriate appreciation for human wickedness. You don’t have a naïve blind faith in people – well, I never need to check on my business partner. I am sure my partner or bookkeeper would never steal from me or would never take more than 50% for him or herself. There is no need for an audit of our books.” Because there are seeds of the beast being sown every where at all times, we are not naïve. We don’t say, “Well, I am sure that my brother or sister would never take more than their fair share of our parent’s estate. That they will arrange all of the finances as the executor or administrator of the estate exactly fairly and squarely.”

I don’t ever need to check up on my spouse and ask questions like: why are you working so late? Or why are you hanging around so much with that other person? Or why are you not home? Or why do your stories not check out?

Listen, because there are seeds of the beast, even though God is in control, here in the church we try to set up appropriate boundaries and systems of accountability to check the human inclination toward wickedness. We have independent audits of our books to make sure no one is taking from the till. And we have multiple counters of our money to make sure that the human tendency to cheat is kept in check. And that is why we go through our credit card bills and why we have numerous overlapping policies to protect the children that are being watched in our children’s ministry classes. And why we have

clear policies for pastors as they get together with members of the opposite sex. And that is why we have security personnel walking around the building here at night.

God's control doesn't mean that you don't put in place in your life, your business, your relationships, various mechanisms of accountability to pour weed killer over the sowing of the seeds of the beast.

But because God is in control, we don't need to be anxious. Think about this. If God is in control of everything, if he really does have all authority over every beast and every little arrogant king, then what do you have to really worry about? He rules Satan. He rules people. He rules nature. He rules governments. He rules corporations. He rules your boss. He rules your ex-spouse. He rules the judge before whom you have been sued. He rules the colleges that you are applying to. He rules your body and every cell in your body. He rules your body chemistry. If God is in control and he promises to work every thing together for your good, what do you have to worry about? There are no 'what-ifs' with God. God is in control of all the what-ifs.

Will you experience future pain? Yes. We live in a world that is populated by beasts. Will you are having difficulty in your life? Yes. Will you get sick? Yes. In all those things, will God be in control? Yes. Does he know about it ahead of time? Yes. Will he work it for your good? Yes.

The fact that you worry a lot, that you are anxious a lot, that you fret a lot and I fret, worry and am anxious, means that we don't understand God's control and we don't believe it. As he is seated on a throne and because God is in control means that we don't have to strive. It is wonderful to recognize that God is shouldering the burden of spreading the kingdom. Often in the way that we relate in Christianity and the spread of kingdom activity in the world, it appears that we don't believe that someone is reigning. A wife wants to see her husband saved, what does she do? She pins little notes on his pillow with Bible verses. She sings Christian songs to him at night. She presses and presses and drives him up a wall. Does she believe God is in control? Does she believe that if a seed is sown, God can take it from there?

You want a family member saved. Do you believe God could do it? That he will hear your prayers, that you don't have to push and prod and press. That you don't have to bring about premature births all over the place, manipulate people into a premature salvation. We explain the gospel, we pray. We share boldly. We share openly. We live our lives in humility with integrity and salvations will just start happening around us because God does it.

This doesn't lead to laziness. I believe the greatest paralyzer of the church is our lack of faith that God is in control. As I interact with people, I find them frozen by their lack of faith in God's control, by the fear that all these beasts are at work and there is nothing they can do. The beasts are going to take away their children. The beasts are going to destroy their marriages. The beasts are going to kill them or destroy their bodies.

As I tried to recruit people for kingdom activity and giving away the kingdom, the notion that a person can put their life in the hands of God is so freeing. “You mean someone like me,” a person will say, “with all of my issues and all of my past sins, someone like me could be a missionary?” That I am not too inadequate? I am not too small? Someone like me could be a leader? Someone like me could lead other people to Christ? When you realize that it doesn’t all rest on you, that God is shouldering the major weight, that from heaven God rules, that it is up to him to heal the sick. It is up to him to cast out demons. I believe that view of God sets us free to labor with all of our might.

You know, I didn’t set out to be a pastor of a church this size. I didn’t set out to build this massive institution or to have nearly 4 acres of building under roof. Whenever I start fretting and getting anxious about the growth of the church and the fact that we have added 2000 people in the last 2½ years, I toss and turn in my bed, the freeing thought to me is “God has done this. God is in control. I can believe God for even more.” In the face of all the beasts of the culture, I can say, “God I trust you. I will lean in and do my little part. In this crazy world, I trust that you are in control.”

Let’s pray.