



Dreams Of Future Past

Daniel 2

Speaker: Scott Mann

Disclaimer: This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.

Well, good morning. Warm welcome to all of you. It's great to be with you in worship today. And to those joining us online, so grateful that you are here.

I'm Scott Mann, Associate Pastor for Discipleship, and I get to preach on one of the most awesome chapters in the Bible, Daniel 2. But before we get to the awesome, we have to appreciate that it happens during really awful circumstances for God's people.

Last Sunday, Pastor Scott Dudley began our sermon series on the Book of Daniel, which has good news for people who could really use some hope and courage. It was written to people who felt defeated, powerless, who faced a bleak future or no future, where violence, suffering, and power were out of control.

So when we feel a loss of hope or faith or we question, where is God when our world falls apart, God encourages us with the Book of Daniel. So let's pray again as we get in here.

So Holy Spirit, help us to hear your good news for us today from Daniel, and help us to trust you, especially when things look bad, amen.

Well, our scripture begins at the beginning of the exile, when God's chosen people were ruthlessly conquered by a foreign empire, and some, including Daniel, were forcibly deported to be assimilated into the Babylonian culture. All of Jerusalem was destroyed, including the temple, and many, many people were killed, and the rest were left in a wasteland of war.

Last week, we heard how Daniel and his friends were taken captive and trained to serve in the imperial court. God showed him favor, and the king included him along with many of his royal advisors.

Chapter 2 begins with a big crisis. Daniel and his friends are told that the king, in a fury, ordered the execution of all royal advisors in the kingdom. Why? Including them. Why? Because the king had a dream, and he didn't know what it meant. To ensure that he could trust their interpretations, he ordered his wise men first to tell him what he had dreamed. Who could do that? Only God.

So what do Daniel and his friends do? Panic? No. They remember their Bible stories. They remember way back in Genesis, when God gave Pharaoh a dream he couldn't understand without Joseph. So they remembered their scriptures, and they asked the king for time to pray. And then, together, they practiced listening prayer, asking God to help them like he helped Joseph, and listening for his answer.

And that night, God reveals the dream and its interpretation to Daniel. They praise God, and Daniel heads straight for the king. He says, no wise man anywhere can reveal your dream and its interpretation, but there is a God in heaven who is the revealer of mysteries. Daniel chapter 2:31 picks it up:

Your majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statue, an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were all broke into pieces and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace, but the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king.

Your majesty, you are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory. You are the head of gold. After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, for iron breaks and smashes everything. And as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others.

In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the rock, of the vision of the rock cut out of the mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold to pieces.

The king said to Daniel, surely your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery. Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon, and placed him in charge of all its wise men. Is that awesome or what?

So echoing the Joseph story, God answers prayer, giving Daniel the dream and its interpretation. Many, many people are saved from death. Daniel is honored and elevated, second only to the king. Sound familiar? And the pagan king praises Daniel's God as God over all gods and nations. Everybody wins. That's awesome. And we haven't even talked about the dream itself.

In fact, God gives several dreams throughout Daniel, which foretell the future, both here in chapter two and in later chapters. God gives these dreams around 530 BC, and the events they portray cover the following 600 years—600 plus years—with incredibly specific details. We can look back now and see that history perfectly fulfilled what was foretold in Daniel.

The gold Babylonians were followed by the silver Persian Empire, and then the bronze Greeks, and then the iron Romans. And that—Romans—is where Jesus, not made by humans, enters history and establishes his spiritual kingdom, which grows to fill the whole earth and lasts forever. Amazing.

In chapters seven and eight, Daniel himself has dreams that get even more specific. With historical hindsight, we can see that they describe Alexander the Great's lightning conquest, and upon his death, the division of the Greek Empire into four lesser kingdoms. It describes the rise of an evil king who would try to destroy the Jews, which we now know as Antiochus Epiphanes.

This happened in 167 BC, and it launched the Maccabean Revolt, which was the origin of the celebration we know as Hanukkah. And there's more. Daniel is an awesome book. There's even stuff about the end of history that the Book of Revelation picks up. But that's another sermon.

All of this is super awesome. But the most important thing is what Chapter 2 emphasizes: the coming of the Kingdom of God when Jesus is born.

Now just as Daniel points forward to Jesus, Jesus was constantly referring back to Daniel. Jesus often referred to himself as the Son of Man, which comes directly from Daniel. On the night of his arrest, Jesus twice tells Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world," which again is a reference to Daniel's rock, not cut by human hands, which surpassed all earthly kingdoms and grew to fill the whole earth forever.

Jesus described his kingdom as a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds. Yet, when it grows, it becomes the largest plant in the garden. When Jesus foretells the future for his disciples on several occasions, he uses images and phrases from Daniel.

Later in Daniel, it says, "The holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, forever and ever." That may sound familiar to some of you from the New Testament song, "The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever." Yes, you recognize Handel's Hallelujah Chorus made that verse very famous.

Jesus and his disciples knew Daniel very well. They drew hope and encouragement from it because their suffering under the foreign Roman Empire was so similar to Daniel's context. But not only that—why do you think expectations for a Messiah to appear were at a fever pitch during Jesus' lifetime? Because people knew the predictions in Daniel. They were expecting God to send a Messiah to smash the Roman Empire.

Even the wise men from the East who brought gifts to Jesus knew the Jewish Messiah had been born. How did they know? Because every wise man knew the stories of Daniel and his scriptures. Daniel was the chief wise man in Babylon and then later in Persia during his whole long lifetime.

Okay. So Daniel deeply influenced and encouraged Jesus and his disciples. So how can Daniel encourage, give us hope and courage through Daniel?

First, God rules sovereignly over all nations and history. We can be tempted to think that the world is out of control. And yes, the rulers of the nations often ignore or work against God's loving purposes. People like you and me can rebel against God, but God is so big, he can still steer the course of history according to his purposes. He can redeem sinful choices and errors. We can trust God, who can bring down rulers and work around them and bring good out of evil. The Book of Daniel so clearly shows that God is orchestrating all of history for his loving purposes.

So no matter how out of control the world seems, God's sovereign love can intervene and guide history on the world stage as well as in our own personal lives. We can draw courage and hope from all the times God's done it before.

Second, Daniel gives us hope and courage because God cares for his people in exile. We are not alone when we feel abandoned, broken, and our circumstances have never been worse. God cared for his people in bondage—in Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Rome. God sees and hears and knows, and most importantly, God cares. God answers prayer and prospers his people, even in exile, over and over again. We can draw hope and courage from the scriptures, and come to God in prayer, asking for what we need, as Jesus taught us to do, and as Daniel modeled for us.

Third, Daniel gives us hope and courage when God triumphs over evil and puts things right. God stops a needless mass execution and makes Daniel a top leader in Babylon. Daniel and Isaiah and Jeremiah—they all foretold that God would not only bring good things to his people during their exile, but would ultimately bring restoration, justice, and would defeat evil. The exile would end. God delivered his people over and over. Yes, bad things happen when bad rulers have their way for a season. But God triumphs over evil and establishes justice.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King reflected on this encouraging truth. He said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." He knew the scriptures, prayed for God's justice, and led others with courage and hope. Often God triumphs

over injustice and evil in our lifetime through the courageous actions of faithful servants like Daniel or Dr. King. But sometimes God's people must be faithful now and trust in God's future triumph.

Fourth, Daniel gives us hope and courage by pointing to Jesus and his kingdom. What do we learn from Daniel about Jesus' kingdom? It's from God, not humans. It's distinct from all human kingdoms. It will never be destroyed or be surpassed, and it will surpass all human kingdoms. It will endure forever. It will fill the whole earth. God's holy people will receive it and have it forever. And that's all from Daniel, not even the New Testament.

And then, just as foretold, Jesus came and he was always talking about the kingdom of God. Jesus gave us even more descriptions of God's kingdom, including that its spiritual power is surprising and subversive. Jesus triumphed through love, not violence; sacrifice, not domination; and finally defeated death through resurrection. His kingdom is spiritual, but with very real-world history-changing impact. And anyone can see that it has surpassed human kingdoms and continues to grow larger throughout the earth.

So Daniel gives us hope and courage, especially when times are tough. God rules, God cares, God triumphs, and God sends Jesus and his indestructible kingdom.

Today's action steps build from last week. First, read scripture. God's people find hope and courage and guidance and a lot more in the scriptures. Join us this summer as we read through the book of Daniel together. Develop a life habit of reading a section each day, and over time you'll be surprised how much you remember and understand. If you're not familiar with the Bible, that's okay. Just start reading and keep reading. If you don't understand something, that's okay. Just keep reading. Maybe ask a friend or a pastor. I love to talk Bible. I'm happy to chat with you. You can join a Bible study. Lots of things. I'll be hosting a Daniel question and answer sort of thing later this summer, so bring your questions and observations. We'll have a good time. Over time, the scriptures shape us and deepen our relationship with the God they describe.

Which brings us to our second action step, listening prayer. Prayer is the primary way that we develop our relationship with God. Daniel and Jesus spent time in prayer, asking and then listening. Sometimes we forget the listening part. Maybe silence is uncomfortable, but listening prayer develops our ability to hear God. You learn it by doing it. So bring your request to God—for yourself, for others, for our world—and then spend time listening to what God says back. Could be a picture or an idea, or a story from the Bible, a word or phrase. God speaks. God speaks when we're driving, when we're working out, when we're listening to worship music. But we are wise to create some focused silence. As we see modeled in the Bible. Nothing replaces silence for practicing listening prayer. And don't just listen alone. Listen with others. Maybe visit our Listening to God prayer group, which has been helpful to so many for years.

Our third action step: remember God's faithfulness. Remembering is a powerful spiritual practice in the Bible and throughout history. God's people, individually and collectively, we remember together God's faithfulness, and it brings courage and hope and comfort

and guidance for our present and our future. At times, I have found journaling to be incredibly helpful, or you can keep a written record of prayer requests and answers to prayer. When we feel overwhelmed, remembering can shake us out of our present crisis and reconnect us with God's bigger faithfulness. And sometimes we need our community to remember the truth for us—to remind us of God's power, faithfulness, his loving purposes—especially when life is falling apart.

Throughout Daniel, we see him obeying the Bible, praying to God, and remembering God's faithfulness in the past, even though sometimes he couldn't see it in his circumstances yet. And then we see him act—act on God's revelation. Daniel acts on God's guidance, whether from scripture or prayer or his community of faith. He doesn't have to know how his actions are going to turn out. He just courageously acts, come what may. And God uses his actions to further his purposes in the world and to prosper Daniel and many others.

If you don't know what to do, ask God to show you. "God, how do you want to use me in your kingdom?" Maybe it's as simple as some way to love a neighbor or get involved in missions here at church. Now, sometimes we obey and almost no one but God notices, like Daniel's obedience with food in chapter one. Other times when we obey, everybody wins big, like in chapter two. And there are times when we act on God's revelation, and we have to wait patiently before we can see the impact. We just don't know God's timetables.

Years ago, when I was looking for a church to serve as pastor, I was in the final conversations with a fantastic church, and we were negotiating a start date. And then they said no. In that moment, I remember being most surprised by my feelings. I felt confused and disappointed, but that was very quickly replaced with excitement. And I had a big smile on my face, which surprised me. And then I realized why. My mind caught up with my feelings. That job at that church seemed so perfect for me. So if that wasn't what God had for me, I couldn't wait to see what better situation God was preparing for me. I realized the Holy Spirit was giving me hope and courage when I could have been very discouraged. So I kept looking, and God's better answer turned out to be this job in this church. Amen.

In retrospect, I could see that God's timeline was so good. And that helps me trust God when I can't see him putting all the pieces into place.

In Daniel chapter 2, God pulls back the curtain of the future, revealing the coming of the kingdom of God and Jesus. He answers a desperate prayer, saving many lives, and prospers his people in exile. God's sovereign love triumphs and gives us hope and courage in tough times. Amen.

So Jesus, you are in fact, indeed, the sovereign God of all of history, yet you care about every detail of our lives. You hear our desperate prayers. Help us to remember your faithfulness, and participate in your purposes, so that Jesus' kingdom would come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Think of a challenge you face. Identify 3-5 actions Daniel takes to face his challenge. What would it look like in your situation to do what Daniel did?
- How does remembering the awesome power and care of God in the past give you hope and courage for your present and future? How can you practice remembering more (songs, scripture, prayer, journaling, conversation...)?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.