

Sermon – Daniel’s Vision 20-11-22 (SC)

The Ancient of Days

Daniel 7:9-18

Today, we continue our sermon series thinking about Advent, that series of weeks which leads into Christmas. And it’s a period, if we’re honest, that can so often feel like a non-event. It gets squeezed out by our other preparations for Christmas. And before you know it, Advent is simply a time for counting off the days, ticking them off one by one. So perhaps, we could at least say Advent means a sense of anticipation, but could it mean something more?

So this year, we are looking at characters in the Bible to whom the promise of God’s Son was given.

Our first theme, which we thought about a couple of weeks ago now, was SURPRISE, SURPRISE. We looked to the calling of Abraham, and saw there that the promise of God’s Son, meant for Abraham a venture into the unknown. God’s call is ever forward, God’s call is surprising. And we thought about what it might mean to mentally carve out the space this Advent, to listen to God’s voice, and be surprised by his summons.

This week our theme is POWER, POWER. And we turn to the book of Daniel, and this extraordinary vision which we heard read to us earlier.

Perhaps it is ironic, certainly it is important, that Daniel’s vision here should be about the power of God, because to some extent he was in a powerless situation.

Daniel was part of a migrant workforce. He was a Jew, a Hebrew, yes - but we don’t find him anywhere near the Promised Land. You see, Daniel lived through an event called the Exile, an event of national disaster, where Jerusalem and the surrounding region of Judah, were invaded by the expanding conquests of the Babylonian Empire, in modern day Iraq. After the catastrophic fall of Jerusalem, and the destruction of its temple, the Babylonian commanders took back to their homelands the best and brightest, the most able and creative, to serve as slaves.

For the Babylonians, this had a two-fold benefit. It meant the equivalent of their Civil-Service, those who oversaw the administration of an expanding superpower was always freshly supplied with intelligent minds. But it also meant, that those most likely to show a flair for leadership, who might lead a rebellion, were much closer to home, where they could be kept an eye on, and their spirits perpetually crushed.

Daniel was one such exile.

Now we know Daniel for the story about the Lion’s Den, and if you are familiar with the book you know it continues to include some surreal dreams, including our reading today, of the Ancient of Days, and One Like the Son of Man.

Let's turn now to the Bible to remind ourselves. I am reading Daniel 7 v 9.

*"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."*

Now, reading this in context, we could just say that this is a reference to God, and move on. But why use the title "Ancient of Days." Why mention the whiteness of his hair?

And we strike upon a significant cultural difference.

Our culture privileges the ideal of perpetual youth. Industries are fuelled by our shared desire to remain young, be that cosmetics, fashion, fitness. But for Daniel and his generation, to reach old age was an extraordinary gift, and it brought with it the association of the wisdom of years.

Now the exile itself was about 70 years long. And in that time, the exiles, particularly the second-generation exiles would turn to the older generation, and say: "tell me about our homeland." "What was life before we came to this place?" The young made their appeal to the old, because they carried with them a memory of the time before slavery, before exile.

Now, imagine, if there was someone you could appeal to, pray to even, whose memory reached back, not just to the Babylonian exile, but whose memory stretched back beyond the reach of every empire, beyond the span of days themselves. This is God, the Ancient of Days, whose white hair – whose wisdom penetrates deeper, and goes back further than every form and institution of human power. This is the subject of Daniel's vision.

Daniel, the exile, has a vision of the Ancient of Days. But what does he see?

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Daniel sees one like a Son of Man, to whom the Ancient of Days gives an everlasting Kingdom.

The first thing to say about this text, is that the *Son of Man* is the title Jesus uses most to refer to himself. Jesus IS the Son of Man, who received from the Ancient of Days, an everlasting Kingdom. So if we want to get to know the Son of Man, we need to get to know Jesus, as we discover him in the gospels.

So let's consider our Advent reflections: Advent is about looking ahead to see in the Son of Man, one whom the Ancient of Days is pleased to award a Kingdom. Who then should be worthy of such honour, and distinction, such power?

Surely not a child, born in poverty, in the backwaters of a now long-extinct empire!? Surely the Ancient of Days wouldn't award such power to one so lowly, so seemingly insignificant?

Here then is the point to make, to guide our Advent reflections. Advent is a time for reflecting on the ways in which God demonstrates power. Advent is a time to be drawn back to the cross.

And here is where I want to talk about Holy Communion. Holy Communion is the Church's family meal that sustains us. The sacraments are the physical handle our faith grasps, as one theologian put it. And this Advent, I want to encourage you to allow Communion to confront you with the ways in which God demonstrates his power through his Son Jesus Christ.

Every time you receive Communion, think about the way God demonstrates his power through weakness, through what appears like failure. And let this challenge you.

Let this Holy Communion today shape the way in which you exercise power this week. Make the mental and spiritual connection between what happens here, and how you approach your next board meeting, the school run, the commute, the coffee with friends, your next Zoom call.

Let this meal control your appetite for power. To see it, not as an end, but as something which is to be offered in God's service.

This Advent, come back to the message of the Cross.

The Ancient of Days has given an everlasting Kingdom to the Son of Man, who exercises power through weakness.