

## ALIVE IN JESUS

### Daniel 7:1-18

#### Intro

Let me begin by saying that the scriptures for this morning are long.

However, as I read the truncated versions that were suggested by the lectionary (wait a minute, didn't we mention that last week?), not only did the context of the passage seem to change, but the impact that these verses are intended to carry was stripped to a minimalist rendition. That's not good.

Our first passage gives us Daniel's first vision of what is to come. The previous chapters describe Daniel's interpretation of what has been, but now the focus has shifted. Initially, it feels like a bad Halloween movie as we encounter four different beasts.

However, what starts out as something disconcerting, morphs into a vision of One whose dominion is an everlasting dominion. As Christians, the words and descriptions that we are given, even though they were offered hundreds of years prior to his life beginning, lead us directly to Jesus. From a place of faith, we are able to appreciate that the Savior has dominion over all, even the most frightening of places, and that it will be through His sacrifice that we are raised to live, as it says as the conclusion of these verses, forever and ever.

This is the promise that is made to all those who place their faith in God through Jesus. It was, it is, it will be forevermore. Do you believe it for yourself? On this day, when we remember those who have entered into the closer presence of the Almighty, do you believe it for your friends and love ones who have died? The scripture reads this way.

### **Daniel 7:1-18**

<sup>7</sup>In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head as he lay in bed. Then he wrote down the dream: <sup>2</sup>I, Daniel, saw in my vision by night the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea, <sup>3</sup>and four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. <sup>4</sup>The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then, as I watched, its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a human being; and a human mind was given to it. <sup>5</sup>Another beast appeared, a second one, that looked like a bear. It was raised up on one side, had three tusks in its mouth among its teeth and was told, 'Arise, devour many bodies!' <sup>6</sup>After this, as I watched, another appeared, like a leopard. The beast had four wings of a bird on its back and four heads; and dominion was given to it. <sup>7</sup>After this I saw in the visions by night a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth and was devouring, breaking in pieces, and stamping what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that preceded it, and it had ten horns. <sup>8</sup>I was considering the horns, when another horn appeared, a little one coming up among them; to make room for it, three of the earlier horns were plucked up by the roots. There were eyes like human eyes in this horn, and a mouth speaking arrogantly.

<sup>9</sup>As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. <sup>10</sup>A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand

thousand served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgement, and the books were opened.

<sup>11</sup>I watched then because of the noise of the arrogant words that the horn was speaking. And as I watched, the beast was put to death, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire.

<sup>12</sup>As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. <sup>13</sup>As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup>To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

<sup>15</sup>As for me, Daniel, my spirit was troubled within me, and the visions of my head terrified me. <sup>16</sup>I approached one of the attendants to ask him the truth concerning all this. So he said that he would disclose to me the interpretation of the matter: <sup>17</sup>'As for these four great beasts, four kings shall arise out of the earth. <sup>18</sup>But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever—for ever and ever.'

### **Ephesians 1:11-23**

#### **Intro**

Our second passage finds Paul looking to reassure those who have placed their faith in Jesus that not only is the promise of forgiveness and life eternal real but that through his resurrection from the grave the victory has already been secured, it has been secured for all the saints. The scripture reads this way.

### **Ephesians 1:11-23**

<sup>11</sup>In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, <sup>12</sup>so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup>In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; <sup>14</sup>this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

<sup>15</sup>I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason <sup>16</sup>I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup>I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, <sup>18</sup>so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. <sup>20</sup>God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup>far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. <sup>22</sup>And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

### **"Alive in Jesus"**

Our culture has created and fostered an incredible dichotomy.

On the one hand we witness death on an almost daily basis.

We watch it in droves on our TV shows and in our movies ('Walking Dead' anyone?).

We play it in our games (50% of physical game sales in 2015 were of the action and 1<sup>st</sup> person shooter variety and considering that about half of the country's population plays regularly (which is considered at least three hours a week), this is not a small influence.

We see it reported on both broadcast and print news, posted in online mediums (terrorist organizations know that the world is watching), and spoken of in social media circles of all ages (suicides are up across a multitude of age spectrums and in too many cases there are circles of encouragement that death is the only 'way out').

Again, it's always there.

And yet, when death knocks on our own door (when we experience it in our families, with our co-workers, through our friends and absolutely our social circles), we avoid it, pretend it's not there, or allow it to wash over us like a wave that has swamped us.

Even in the church, we struggle talking about death, let alone dealing with it. For example how many of you have heard (or even said) one of the following phrases in regard to someone who has died: they have 'passed away', 'fallen asleep', 'gone to be with God', or even that the person was 'lost'.

It's not that any of these turns of phrases are necessarily wrong, but all of them wrap death in something that tries to make it more...palatable. And again, we experience death through a multitude of mediums on an almost daily basis.

What this shows to me is that for those who mourn, death, even from a place of faith, is painful. It just is. We may have numbed ourselves to the truths of death in a multitude of contexts, but when we actually have to deal with its realities, we try and put it in a box that can be put away emotionally, or allow our lives to be taken over by it.

For even in the cases where we can understand that the person who has died is no longer struggling, no longer suffering, the severing of the relationship leaves a mark. And that happens for those individuals who have been preparing in some way, any way, for the fact that their friend or loved one was going to die.

For those who experience death through tragedy, the wound that is created casts a much wider berth with an impact that can be far greater. In these cases, death begins to take on the character on one of the beasts mentioned in the vision by Daniel.

Death causes hurt, and pain, and distress.

That's why, over the last few years, this congregation has been invited to acknowledge that it does hurt, and do so from a place of faith, so that we might be able to embrace the entirety of the journey of life.

Both of the passages that we have heard this morning acknowledge the fact that death is a part of life.

However, they do not allow the reader to be left in that valley of dry bones. Instead, we are taken to a place where we are reminded of the kingdom of the

One who attended by ten thousand by ten thousand, and that His dominion will last for all time. We have, as is spoken by Paul, been promised to obtain this inheritance, not by anything that we have done or not done, but instead through the sacrifice of the One who has authority in every age that is to come.

These reminders do not remove the pain that comes from death. We were created to be in relationship with one another, and when the ability or opportunity to connect with another is no longer there, we hurt.

But what these passages, and so many others like them, point us to, is the fact that these lives, which we rightly consider so very precious, are not the end of the story. That under the authority of the One who was born, lived, died, and was raised, we are welcomed into a fellowship that has no end.

This does not mean that death doesn't leave a mark.

Again, the relationship that was, is no longer there and that hurts.

And yet, or maybe it is because of the pain that we carry, it feels as if, in so many ways, that they are still here with us.

What we are promised through scripture is that they are: certainly not in the way that we were once in relationship with them, but they are still here with us because they have been welcomed into an everlasting relationship with the Almighty.

Where do I get this understanding? In verse 10 of the reading from Daniel, the vision describes, in regard to the figure whom our contemporary eyes and ears would recognize as God the Father, that "A thousand thousand served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him."

This number is meant to try and articulate infinity, or more appropriately, all people serving God.

And then just a few verses later, in reference to the one whom Daniel sees as the human being who comes before God the Father, "To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed."

Did you hear that?

All people, all nations, all languages serving the One who has been given dominion.

Who does that sound like?

Again, as we heard in Ephesians, "God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come."

Those who have died, our neighbors and friends, our brothers and sisters, our mothers and fathers, our husbands and wives, our sons and daughters, they have been welcomed into the presence of the Divine and as they are with God Almighty who is with us through the Spirit, so are our loved ones.

They are still with us, and they have been made well, they are strong, sickness and pain are no longer a part of their reality, for they are members of the great uncountable assembly that we know as the Communion of Saints, who watch over us, imploring us to trust in the promises that God has placed before us, the promises that we have been reminded of here today.

The pain that we feel when we are no longer able to be in relationship is real. And so is the fact that in Jesus, our loved ones are not only cared for, and been made well, but blessed in such a way that they know that the promises that have been made through Scripture are real and true. They are alive! In Jesus they are alive!

I pray that we are able to hear that truth for when you do, the pain that you feel from the temporary loss of that precious relationship, will be wrapped in arms of comfort and care, arms that are forevermore, arms that will hold us until the time when we might be able to resume those relationships in a new, eternal, and God-trusting way.

#### **After Sermon Prayer**

Holy God, throughout time, You have been reaching out into the world, creating anew, showing us over and over again that Your redemptive will is able to bridge even the greatest divide. God, we pray that we might be able to place our trust in You as the saints who watch over us now have done. Lead us in our thoughts, words, and deeds to be instruments of that creative Spirit until the day that we too are able to understand the fullness of Your eternal creativity. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.