

READ Daniel 7. *Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.*

At the time of the exile, prophets were leaders of the people of Israel. They kept the people in touch with God. Sometimes Israel's political leaders did not like the prophecies and would destroy them. (See Jeremiah 36) But God told the prophets to write them down again because they were important. When a prophecy was put in writing that initiated its fulfillment. Prophecies were a word from the Lord and writing it down allowed it to continue to speak.

Prophecies were encouragements to people who were in great distress. The exile was a time that God's people felt like they had been cast off, were despised, and subject to rulers and others who did not have their best interests at heart. The prophets helped God's people to see God's big vision and good outcome for them.

The dream vision in Daniel 7 happened when Belshazzar was king of Babylon. It sounds like an apocalypse. It tells us of the power of evil in the world coming against God and God's people.

Evil is the force in nature or the heart that governs and gives rise to wickedness and sin. Evil is immoral and opposes good. You know in the Lord's Prayer where it says, "Deliver us from evil." Some translations say, "Deliver us from the Evil One." So evil is synonymous with the devil. Satan can lure someone into evil, but Jesus is triumphant over the devil.

Daniel's vision shows the havoc wreaked by evil and its presence is felt today. Thus, we are wise not to pin down prophecies to a specific time and place. They speak to each generation. God communicates to us in our own tragedies just as God spoke to Israel in its tragedies. God wants us to read the prophecies and see His big picture so that we can be encouraged.

You heard the description of the four beasts. They rose out of a chaotic, dangerous storm on the sea. They were powerful, brutal, and terrifying. They are predators which ravage and consume. They inflict the worst possible pain. Daniel was especially concerned about the little horn with the big, prideful, arrogant, talking mouth. We, too, hear prideful, arrogant talk against God.

We learn that these four ominous creatures represent kings of nations. But which nations they are is unclear. We might be inclined to dismiss this story because we can't figure that out exactly. It's like Paul says,

"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

We cannot let that stop us. We must try to understand this story because prophecies give us great hope.

God comes to judge these terrible nations. All the time, the horn continued to speak noisy, arrogant words, but the beast with the mouth is easily defeated by God, put to death and burned. *See the victory!* The other beasts were dethroned, but they were allowed to live and they continue to try to crush God's people by violence and immorality. But they cannot destroy because God has taken the power of death away:

"When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up

in victory.” Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Cor 15:54-55)

We are given that sure hope. God has certainly overcome death.

Daniel watches the judgment. Do you want evil people to be judged? Throughout history evil rises again and again in individuals and nations. Rest assured, judgment is coming; evil people have no dominion. Dominion has been given to God’s children.

Then “one like a human being came with the clouds of heaven.” He does not rise up from water, which represents of the earth and chaos. But He comes from eternity, from heaven. He is presented to God. We know this is Jesus, who saves us from evil and will come again. After his resurrection, as he is lifted to heaven, two men in white appeared and said to the disciples, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Daniel’s vision gives us a glimpse of the other side. *The Ancient One on the throne gave Jesus dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting one that shall not pass away.* (Dan 7:14) Even though the evil beasts were still allowed to live, even though they still are active in this world, their dominion was taken away. They are not going to win or prevail over God’s holy ones. God’s children, God’s holy ones will win and they will possess the kingdom that lasts.

This is such great news that it is repeated three times. (vs. 18, 22, 27)

We are all feeling the impact of evil against a beautiful church family. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, the disciples felt the pressure, too. Yet Jesus said, “*It is not for you to know the time and the plans God has set*, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

What? You mean we just think about being a witness for Jesus? Really? What about the pain? What it means is you have experienced Jesus as a reality and you are convinced. You have been in the war, but you are not overcome. The battle is strong, but you belong to Jesus. Thus you push back the darkness to let His prevailing Light in. He has won the battle. You bear that truth.

A hymn from the 16th century still rings out: *A mighty fortress is our God, A bulwark never failing. Our Helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.* Jesus prevails. Jesus has defeated the enemy of death. He said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). Do you believe that?

When Peter proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus said, “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it.” (Mt 16:18)

The gates of hell have come against First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs but it will not overcome them because they are the Lord's. Sutherland Springs will prevail.

Where did we see God prevailing in Sutherland Springs on November 5? We saw God:

- in the two men who pursued the killer and he was taken out;
- We saw God in the police who came and restored order;
- in the Fire Department paramedics who took care of the wounded;
- We saw God in the tears and prayers of survivors as the whole town huddled together and though broken hearted, offered forgiveness.

Sutherland Springs gave witness to the entire nation, and to all the people in our country who have lost their faith. The Good News is most powerful when circumstances are bad.

- Daniel facing the lion's den in faith changed the king (ch. 6)
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace declared God's power and impacted a nation (ch 3)
- Stephen's witness as he was stoned to death converted Paul (Acts 7).
- Paul in chains for his faith changed Rome.
- Jesus dying on the cross changed us all.
- FBC Sutherland Springs' witness to their faith is changing our nation.

That's the power and love of God which prevails in the face of terrible evil.

Paul was once discouraged by his sufferings to the point of death. His pain was real, but his consolation was abundant. He and his friends felt unbearably crushed. (2 Cor. 1:5, 8). But they testified: "Through God's power though we are afflicted, we are not crushed; we are perplexed by not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." (2 Cor. 4:8-9) They said, "We believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us . . . into his presence." (2 Cor. 4:13-14)

All the people who died at that precious church entered heaven together. Now they pray for their brothers and sisters who are left, so that they have hope. A 16-year-old girl who was killed said to her mother who dropped her off at the church that morning, "I love you. I will see you later." Indeed, they all will see one another again.

That is our prayer for First Baptist Church Sutherland Springs, that their faith will prevail and they have the assurance that their relatives are alive.

What trial are you facing?

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

God is good, and good wins in the end.

"Then the court shall sit in judgment, and the dominion (of evil) shall be taken away, to be consumed and totally destroyed. The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their

kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.”
(Daniel 7:26-27)

Endure to the end as Jesus strengthens you and you will prevail, for you are on the winning side.

AMEN