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Sermon Notes

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Worldly Empires Rise and Fall, Christ's Empire is Eternal

Daniel 2:24-49

I. The Rise and Fall of the World

A. The Fall of the United States of America: Alexander Tyler's Observations

Professor Alexander Tyler, 1770's: "A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover they can vote themselves money from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that a democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy, followed by dictatorship."

The average age of the world's greatest civilizations has been 200 years: These nations have progressed through the following sequence:

From BONDAGE to SPIRITUAL FAITH; from SPIRITUAL FAITH to GREAT COURAGE; from COURAGE to LIBERTY; from LIBERTY to ABUNDANCE; from ABUNDANCE to SELFISHNESS; from SELFISHNESS to COMPLACENCY; from COMPLACENCY to APATHY; from APATHY to DEPENDENCY; from DEPENDENCY back into BONDAGE

B. One Empire After Another

An Empire begins, reaches its peak of glory, fades, dies, and another rises in its ashes

C. The Thirst for Eternity: Hitler's "Thousand-year Reich", Albert Speer & "Germania"

On September 4, 1934, the Nazi Party concluded its annual congress at Nuremberg, Germany. Adolph Hitler had the following proclamation read: "The German form of life is definitely determined for the next thousand years... There will be no other revolution in Germany for the next one thousand years!" The crowd went berserk with joy and shouted "Heil, Hitler!" Twelve years, four months, and eight days later, the Third Reich was totally destroyed, leaving Germany nothing but a pile of rubble

D. Today's Message: Of Kingdoms that rise and fall, and of a kingdom that is eternal

E. Context: Daniel 1 & Daniel 2:1-23

F. Deeper issue: God's concern for His great name is EVANGELISTIC!!

When God's name is exalted, people get saved!!

II. The Revealer Introduced (vs. 24-30)

A. Daniel Intercedes (24)

1. Daniel's compassion: concern for others
 - a. seen again in ch. 4: concern for Nebuchadnezzar
 - b. Godly character always results in compassion for salvation of neighbors
 - c. a theme of entire chapter is EVANGELISM!! Thus, evangelists must have compassion on the perishing
2. Daniel's confidence: based on certainty of the revelation... based on His faith in God
3. Daniel's courage: based on God's hand on his life... he fears nothing

B. Daniel Introduced (25)

1. Arioch's opportunism: "I have found a man..."
2. YET, God's sovereign orchestration... Arioch was a powerful man; Daniel has immediate entry
3. NOTE: one doesn't simply come into the presence of a mighty emperor whenever one chooses... how then shall we stand before the God of all the Earth? Christ alone is our "introduction"

Romans 5:1-2 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

C. Daniel Interrogated (26)

1. King zeroes in immediately on the issue at hand: CAN YOU DO IT??
 - a. test remains: tell me "What I saw in my dream"
 - b. AND interpret it?
 - c. real issue: I want to know the future!! This dream's interpretation holds the key

2. Daniel also gives his own Babylonian name: Belteshazzar

Belteshazzar = “May Bel protect his life” [Bel = Baal, the chief god of the Canaanites]

D. Daniel Introduces (27-30)

Now that he is introduced, Daniel does the introducing... “King Nebuchadnezzar, prepare to meet your God!!”

1. Evangelistic leveling

vs. 27 Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about..."

- a. human pride must be leveled
- b. Nebuchadnezzar had no confidence in them anyway
- c. BUT Nebuchadnezzar still worshipped human ability, as we shall see
- d. human pride must be leveled so God’s glory can be established

2. Evangelistic worship

vs. 28 but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come.

- a. the most powerful witness: worship a sovereign God in their hearing
- b. when God’s name and powers are lifted up, people fall on their faces in repentance and faith
- c. Daniel, like Joseph before him, clearly acknowledges the source of the wisdom

God is a “revealer of mysteries” so deep no wise man on earth could know them

- d. Daniel also states the content of the dream: revelation of the future
- e. In so doing he worships God’s supernatural knowledge

3. Evangelistic miracle

The Future is secret to us, but God know it completely

Our thoughts are secret to us, but God knows them completely

vs. 28-29 *Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these: "As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come*

- a. With God's power, Daniel did what no one else could do... he read the King's mind
- b. "Is nothing sacred? Even my own thoughts are fully open to God??" YES!!

Psalm 139:1-4 *O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. ² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.*

Amazing!! Daniel told the king what he was thinking about as he lay on his bed!

- c. this is a miracle... an evangelistic display of God's supernatural power
- d. it also points to Judgment Day... all God says now is "This is what was on your mind, O King"... Later, God will judge the thoughts of his heart
- e. it also sets up the topic of the revelation: THE FUTURE

Nebuchadnezzar was worried about what would happen to his kingdom after he died

A constant concern of monarchs is their place in history... their legacy. And they are no different than mere mortals before the power of the grave

4. Evangelistic humility

vs. 30 *As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.*

- a. Daniel cuts off any honors which might be given him
- b. he cares little for the esteem of men
- c. all glory and honor goes to the Lord for this supernatural power
- d. Daniel also states the personal appeal: THIS INSIGHT IS FOR YOU, O KING!

I believe God is laboring for the salvation of this pagan dictator... this was the first step in the journey

Summary: God clears the stage of all the charlatans so His messenger can appear alone. Daniel is not there as the Revealer of the dream but as the messenger of the true Revealer of Mysteries, God Himself... The entire event is orchestrated for evangelistic purposes; first for Nebuchadnezzar himself, then for those who lived at that time, then, for all who would come later and who would read Daniel's account.

God introduces Himself to this pagan king, and through him, to the entire pagan world: "I am God and there is no other, I am God and there is none like me!!"

III. The Revelation Declared (vs. 31-36)

A. The Statue Described

1. Descriptive words

- a. large, enormous: huge, monstrous, imposing... it dwarfed the onlooker
- b. dazzling: extraordinarily brilliant... breath-taking radiance... blinding
- c. awesome or terrifying... creating a sense of terror in the onlooker

2. Unique structure: descent of metals

gold head (Aramaic lit. "fine gold")... chest & arms of silver... belly & thighs of bronze... legs of iron... feet partly iron & partly clay

John MacArthur: as the statue goes down from the head, the metals get less valuable : Gold worth \$270/oz., silver only \$4.70/oz.

with lower density: gold is densest, then silver, then bronze, then iron... thus the statue tends to be top-heavy... especially with feet of clay

YET: metals get stronger, more durable, tougher: gold is softest, silver a little harder, bronze very hard, iron hardest of all

B. The Statue Destroyed

1. The Destroyer Appears

- a. a stone, prepared while Nebuchadnezzar watched
- b. a specific mission for this stone: the end of the statue

2. The Stone's Supernatural Origin

- a. “cut-out” = quarried... cut from a rock
- b. NOT BY HUMAN HANDS... this is the key difference; all the other metals were quarried from the earth by human ingenuity, but this stone had no human origin
- c. a stone of supernatural origin

3. A Guided Missile

- a. heads right for the weakest part: feet of clay
- b. guided missile with a specific mission... to destroy the entire statue
- c. stone strikes the feet and crushes the entire statue as though it were as fragile as crystal

4. Chaff in the Wind: No Trace Left

- a. statue reduced to fine rubble... smashed literally to pieces
- b. every part of the statue destroyed together
- c. the pieces left like chaff on the threshing floor
- d. the wind blows them all away
- e. NOT A TRACE IS LEFT!!!

C. The Stone Exalted

- 1. The Stone Replaces the Statue
- 2. The Stone Grows Larger and Larger, Becoming a Mountain
- 3. The Stone Fills the Whole Earth

Summary: Daniel recounts the dream with incredible detail, even involving Nebuchadnezzar in the retelling; “As you watched, O King, these things happened...” Daniel has therefore met the first test: tell me my dream... now comes the real point: the interpretation!!

vs. 36 “This was the dream. Now we will interpret it to the king.”

NOTE: Daniel’s total and constant reliance on God... “**We** will interpret it...”

IV. The Revelation Explained (vs. 37-45)

A. Overall interpretation: human history on a grand scale

1. Chronological account from top to bottom
2. No time information given, however... the days are numbered, but God holds the number secret
3. The kingdoms rise and fall... one empire swallows up the previous one
4. "Devolution" not "evolution"... always down, down, down... pure gold down to partly clay
5. Returning to the soil from which it was drawn

Genesis 3:19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Note also: each brick for the Tower of Babel made from clay baked through

Genesis 11:1-4 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ² As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. ³ They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

In the end the whole mass of human achievement sinks back down into the earth from which its base elements were drawn.

B. Details of the Human Kingdoms

1. The Head of Gold: Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire
 - a. Aramaic: "pure gold"... highest quality, more glorious
 - b. Nebuchadnezzar himself is the head of gold... not the Babylonian empire as a whole
 - c. when Nebuchadnezzar died, no ruler is found that had the same power
 - d. within twenty-three years of his death, Babylon fell to the Medes/Persians
2. The Chest and Arms of Silver: "Another Kingdom"... Medes and Persians
 - a. Daniel says nothing about this kingdom except "inferior to yours"

- i) perhaps means “not so glorious and powerful”
 - ii) perhaps means “lower on the statue”
 - b. of course, this is the Kingdom Nebuchadnezzar would worry about the most
 - c. God gives him no information with which he might seek to change the outcome
3. The Belly and Thighs of Bronze: A Third Kingdom... the Greeks
- a. bronze well identified with Greek armies... shields, helmets, swords made of bronze which gleamed brilliantly on the battlefield
 - b. Daniel says only: “it will rule the whole earth”
 - c. Alexander the Great conquered every piece of land known to him, even as far as the Indus River in India
4. The Legs of Iron and the Feet of Clay: The Fourth Kingdom...ROME!
- a. Daniel gives the most information about this one
 - b. “strong as iron”... incredible strength; without question the most powerful empire the Western world has seen...
 - c. Rome lasted for over seven hundred years in the Western part of Europe, and until the 1450’s in the Eastern part
 - d. “crushing and breaking in pieces”... Rome shattered all the lands it conquered... it does temporarily what Christ’s kingdom will do permanently... removes all traces of what came before it

Illus. After defeating the Carthaginians in the Third Punic War, the sowed the fields around Carthage with salt so that nothing could grow there... Carthage was never rebuilt

- e. FEET and TOES??
 - i) partly iron, partly clay... a mixture of what was strongest in the earth and what was weakest
 - ii) “baked clay” hard yet brittle, fragile
 - iii) “divided kingdom” with some strength and some weakness
 - iv) toes: mixed also... partly strong, partly brittle

v) people a mixed people, not well-adhering to one another

Tough questions: Is this the “final state of the Roman empire”; are the ten toes “ten member nations?” Is the striking of the statue by the rock representative of the second coming of Christ at the end of the world, or the entire process of the building of the Kingdom of God from the first through the second comings?

We’ll look at those questions more carefully next time!!

C. The Eternal Kingdom

vs. 44 "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.

1. The Kingdom established by God,
as opposed to humans
2. The Kingdom will never be destroyed,
unlike human empires that all sink into the dust
3. The Kingdom which will never be conquered by others,
unlike human empires that become gradually weakened & are taken over

This is none other than the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, who will reign over the earth as prophesied in the Psalms and Prophets

V. The Rewards Bestowed (vs. 46-49)

A. On Daniel: The “Big Three” the world has to offer

1. Honor

vs. 46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor

Astonishing that this mighty potentate would fall prostrate before a Jewish youth, an exile of a conquered people... but the supernatural power of God has brought Nebuchadnezzar to his knees!!

2. Gifts

vs. 46 “an offering, incense”... vs. 48 “gave him many gifts...”

3. Power

vs. 48 *Then the king placed Daniel in a high position ... He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men.*

These three are the most precious thing a worldly potentate has to offer: earthly honor, material wealth, vast powers... this will be Daniel’s sternest test of all!

Proverbs 27:21 The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives.

B. On Daniel’s Friends

vs. 49 *Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.*

A wise and thoughtful move on Daniel’s part... having allies to help him administer the king’s affairs in a godly way

C. On God

Nebuchadnezzar’s highest praise he reserves for God Himself:

vs. 47 *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."*

Amazing! Nebuchadnezzar recognizes the Daniel’s God rules even over him, for he calls him “Lord of kings...”

Sadly, Nebuchadnezzar is only speaking words at this point... he will soon forget and try to exalt himself over the power of God... conversion to genuine repentance and faith is never an easy journey!

VI. Applications

A. What does this teach us about...

God Humanity History Christ ?????

B. How Should We Then Live?

A. What does this teach us about...

1. God

a. God's foreknowledge

- God knows all of human history in detail before any of it comes to pass... [at this point Rome was a minor Etruscan city barely able to control its immediate hills; it would never have been considered a remote threat to conquer the world]
- God's supernatural foreknowledge extends even to minor details concerning these kingdoms
- God knows the strengths and weakness of each empire, and when their days are finished nothing can change his decree
- THEREFORE: fear not, no matter what is happening in the unfolding of history... nothing catches God by surprise

b. God's intimate personal knowledge

- God knew every minor detail that flitted through King Nebuchadnezzar's brain as he lay on his bed
- Even our secret thoughts are wide open and clear to God
- What kinds of thoughts pass through your minds as you lay on your beds?
- THEREFORE: Take every thought captive to Christ... God demands purity in our hearts: "Clean hands and a pure heart" Think of every secret thought as being broadcast widely before assembled masses

c. God's sovereign power

- Not only does God understand all human history... he actively rules over it!! Kings and empires are raised up when God says so
- This will become clearer as we study Daniel 4... God is King of Kings and can depose a king any time He chooses
- Furthermore, even the small decisions they make as they rule are under His sovereign control
- THEREFORE: Bring your life under total submission to His mighty power...allow Him to rule over you every moment; also, be not afraid for the outcome of Presidential elections or the rising of other nations to power or prominence... God rules over all

d. God's mercy

- Everything done in this chapter is for the salvation of those who hear and believe...God's self-revelation is merciful! We would never have known Him if He hadn't revealed Himself
- God communicates His foreknowledge and His sovereign power that we may call on His name for salvation

Romans 10:13 “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

- This includes even a wicked tyrant like Nebuchadnezzar... God is dealing mercifully with him
- Also, note God's mercy in giving us the written word, a permanent record of His nature, power, and acts in the ancient past
- THEREFORE: Call on the name of the Lord... read His word and be amazed at His nature; give thanks to Him for His mercy

2. Human frailty & limitation

a. limited in knowledge

- The wisest of the wise could not give Nebuchadnezzar his answer
- Nebuchadnezzar himself did not understand his own dream
- Daniel clearly testified to his own limited knowledge: He would never have known if God hadn't revealed it to Him

b. limited in power

- King Nebuchadnezzar the purest autocrat in history... absolute power and authority
- YET his power is so clearly limited in this story... even more in chapters 3 & 4

c. limited in time

- Before the grave all humanity alike is powerless
- Every kingdom must end for we are all alike under a death sentence
- The wise men can't keep themselves alive before King Nebuchadnezzar's wrath
- King Nebuchadnezzar himself can't keep himself alive before God's wrath either
- All kingdoms come to an end... so do all people
- Only Christ's resurrection answers this timeless problem of death

- THEREFORE: since humanity is limited in knowledge, power, and time... humble yourself before God... stop trusting in man, who is but nothing; learn to number your days properly

3. History

- Even the mightiest empires in history have feet of clay
- They are all made up of human stuff... and are essentially weak
- In the end they all sink back into the dust from which they came
- Every glorious building, every majestic tower, every mighty war machine will eventually become dust in the wind
- Nothing you can see with your eyes, touch with your hands, hear with your ears is eternal... even the most mighty nations
- THEREFORE: consider yourselves aliens and strangers on earth, citizens of a higher country, an eternal and lasting one... do not primarily consider yourself American, for this earthly empire will also sink into the dust in the end... BUT Christ's kingdom will last forever

4. Christ

- Christ's kingdom has no human origin... it is built by the power of God alone
- From Christ's virgin birth to His powerful resurrection, there is no human power on earth capable of carving out this rock
- So also Christ's kingdom does not grow and advance by human power, but only by God's power
- Christ's kingdom WILL ADVANCE, and it will fill the whole earth... people from every tribe, nation, people, and language will enter that Kingdom and live forever
- Christ's kingdom will last forever and ever
- THEREFORE: repent and enter that Kingdom... give yourself fully to its advance, live only for its glory