

Sunday 19th November 2023 9.00 am and 10.30 am

CHRIST THE KING

Sermon preached by The Revd Dr Tony Martin delivered at Cromwell Presbyterian Church



READINGS:

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

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.
His throne was flaming with fire,
and its wheels were all ablaze.**

**10 A river of fire was flowing,
coming out from before him.**

**Thousands upon thousands attended him;
ten thousand times ten thousand stood
before him.**

**The court was seated,
and the books were opened.**

**11 “Then I continued to watch because of the
boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept
looking until the beast was slain, and its body
destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. 12
(The other beasts had been stripped of their
authority but were allowed to live for a period
of time.)**

**13 “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 worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Psalm 93

The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty;

the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength;

indeed, the world is established, firm and secure.

2 Your throne was established long ago;

you are from all eternity.

3 The seas have lifted up, Lord,

the seas have lifted up their voice;

the seas have lifted up their pounding waves.

4 Mightier than the thunder of the great waters,

mightier than the breakers of the sea—

the Lord on high is mighty.

**5 Your statutes, Lord, stand firm;
holiness adorns your house
for endless days.**

Revelation 1:4b-8

4 John,

To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

7 “Look, he is coming with the clouds,”

**and “every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him”;**

and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.”

So shall it be! Amen.

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

John 18:33-37

33 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

34 “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”

35 “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”

36 Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

37 “You are a king, then!” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

Now, shortly, the first Sunday in December ... is the First Sunday in Advent ... a season when we focus on God coming to us ... as a baby ... in Bethlehem ... Immanuel ... the incarnation.

But in the lectionary next Sunday ... the Sunday before Advent ... is called Christ the King, and we have a selection of remarkable scripture readings on which to reflect, which I want us to look at today ... because next Sunday we have a Kids Church break-up special.

Now I think the writers of the lectionary for Christ the King just wanted to make sure ... that we understand very clearly ... that Jesus is more than a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes: he is Christ the King.

And I am not sure about you, but I am particularly challenged by these readings this morning, especially in trying to make sense of them.

However, I think the lectionary has done a good job in linking them altogether ... they speak about Christ as King ... and his kingdom which spans all that is known in the created order ... and all that is unknown ... or barely glimpsed at ... in the spiritual world, beyond time and space.

I suggest you buckle your seat belts, place your feet flat on the floor, and be prepared to adopt the brace position. So ... I would like us to look more closely at the reading from Daniel: Daniel chapter 7.

Straight away we notice ... that as one part of his vision faded into another ... Daniel stood and "watched" (v. 9). And we note that several scenes followed in rapid succession.

9 As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat.

The first scene contrasts strongly with the confusion and noise of the opening scene (v. 2) where:

2 Daniel said: “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. 3 Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.

However, here in verse 9 all is calm and orderly ... in the presence of God.

The heavenly court was assembled, and God sat in judgment.

In contrast to the hectic and often demoniacally inspired activity of the earthly kingdoms, God sits on the universal and eternal throne.

You see, the little kingdoms of humankind have their day; however, God is **the Ancient of Days.**

Kingdoms rise and fall, but Daniel ... sees God ... whose ways are everlasting.

His plans stretch into eternity ... whereas the plans of a Nebuchadnezzar or an Alexander or a Caesar are ephemeral ... or lasting for a very short time

We notice that Daniel saw that God wears a garment **white as snow** ... which is understood to mean ... that God has never compromised ... his righteous dealings ... in establishing his kingdom ... as humans have in gaining their kingdoms.

It seems human kingdoms are always caught-up in feverish activity ... economic, military or diplomatic ... but **the Ancient of Days was seated** and all is calm and orderly.

Daniel portrays ... that God is never taken by surprise ... never undecided ... never in a panic about his world. He reigns.

In the face of the terrible havoc that people are able to cause, Daniel is reminded that ultimate authority does not reside in Babylon, Persia, Greece, or Rome. It is in the hands of God.

It is Isaiah's age-old lesson that Daniel is to learn ... and we with him:

You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever (Is. 26:3–5).

So ... Daniel ... implies that ultimate power is not centered in Washington D.C., or London or Beijing, Moscow, Iran, or Wellington. It lies in the hands of God.

And there is even more to this vision of God than sovereign tranquility.

There is the element of judgment.

We read that God's throne is ablaze ... and from it flows a stream of fire.

This is the imagery of divine judgment; and let's compare it with Psalm 50:

**Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent;
A fire shall devour before Him,
And it shall be very tempestuous all around
Him.
He shall call to the heavens from above,
And to the earth, that He may judge His
people. Psalm 50:3–4**

Now in Daniel's vision, tells the judgment of the divine court will go in favour of the saints of God.

It will mean the destruction of the powers of darkness and of the kingdoms of this world order. All this is intimated when:

The court was seated, and the books were opened (v. 10)

Daniel was also given an overwhelming picture of the triumph of God:

A thousand thousands ministered to him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him (v. 10).

I think that Daniel, who had so often dared to stand alone, must have realized, “I am not alone.”

We remember, of course, his experience in the lions’ den and in the fiery furnace. One might say that Daniel had a particular challenging life!

Well, myriads of others served the Lord. But using a military expression, Daniel was an earthly outpost of the heavenly garrison.

Can you see that Daniel was learning some of the implications of Paul's later words?

Seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory (Col. 3:1–4).

Surely, do you agree with me, that Christians ... who have this vision of God ... and his throne ... will never feel alone and isolated.

They will find their point of orientation ... not on earth ... but in heaven (Phil. 3:20–21).

Their perspective ... on history will not arise from below ... but from above ... from the throne of God.

Others may claim to see things realistically ... rather than idealistically; Christians, on the other hand, I believe, will try to gain God's perspective ... to see them as they really are.

Now, a missionary returning home to the United States, in the days when all overseas travel was by ship, found himself arriving in New York Harbour on the same vessel as an acclaimed national figure.

Crowds waited on the quay to greet this person.

The missionary could not help but feel the contrast.

He had been labouring for the treasure that does not perish, pouring his life's blood into sowing the seed of the gospel.

And as he scanned the faces on the dock, he realized that no one had come to welcome him “home.”

As he began to submerge in a wave of self-pity ... he realized the truth ... as clearly as if a voice had spoken to him from heaven: “Do not be discouraged; you have not yet reached home.”

You see this was a new perspective for Daniel, too. It is the perspective to which we are all exhorted:

In Hebrews 12:22–24, it is written “You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the great assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of the just made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the

blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

So, if we succeed in absorbing the impact of the vision of the Ancient of Days ... what follows will seem the less surprising; ... indeed, it possesses a certain inevitability.

You see ... Daniel's attention is drawn back from heaven to earth:

because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking (v. 11).

What did he see? He briefly describes the death of the beast and the destruction of its body.

It is an amazing vision.

The Bible is clear that true world dominion belongs exclusively to God; all others ... in due time ... will be cut short in their path.

The other beasts lose their dominion ... although ... we note their days are prolonged in some sense:

for a season and a time

... presumably meaning an extended period that continues ... but is brought definitely to an end.

And now ... is your seat belt tight ... the books that were opened (v. 10) are closed. God sets things in final order.

The picture changes again, and Daniel's vision now unfolds. It brings us to ... one of the peaks of Old Testament revelation.

Daniel sees:

One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven (v. 13).

This figure comes to the Ancient of Days ... and receives dominion from him.

Verse 14 describes His dominion as:

- glorious ... **to him was given dominion and glory”** ...
- universal ... **That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him** ... and
- everlasting ... **his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.**

These two verses are weighted with theological nuances, and it is important for us to recognize them.

The expression **“One like the Son of Man”** has particular significance.

This is True Man, true humanity.

This is the one who is able to stand in the presence of God ... whose throne is made of ... the fire of his judgment.

This is the one who is worthy to receive:

dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion (v. 14).

This True Man ... is all that humans ... humankind ... as God's image ... was meant to be ... but failed to be.

In the book of Genesis, you see ... we read that Adam and Eve were made to rule and care for creation (Gen. 1:26–28).

But as we know ... Genesis records ... they sinned ... lost their dominion, were expelled from

the garden ... and fell short of God's glory (Rom. 8:23).

And it is fair to say humanity ... based on the Bible ... since then ... has sought to recover that lost dominion ... but without letting go of our sin.

And the consequence ... of course is ...

- damage to creation, which we note today in climate change
- damage to each other in war and violence
- damage to ourselves in endlessly seeking but never find in the peace for which we long

When the Son of Man came, however, he became the servant that Adam had failed to be;

- he reflected the glory of God in his obedience to God.
- And consequently, has been highly exalted.

When we remember ... that just before He was taken up in the clouds ... to the throne of God ... Jesus said:

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18)

... **and** the New Testament leaves us in no doubt ... as to the identity of this **One like the Son of Man** mentioned by Daniel.

And it is more significant that this title is used in the New Testament ... almost exclusively ... by Jesus in referring to himself.

Daniel says that “one like a son of man” would come with the clouds of heaven.

And as I have mentioned ... Jesus picked-up this name ... while he was here on earth.

The name Jesus used for himself ... more than any other ... was the Son of Man.

He took it from this text ... to remind people who he really was.

And Jesus quoted part of Daniel 7:13 & 14 in Matthew 24 ... so that we could understand what Daniel was seeing. Jesus said:

Immediately after the distress of those days [the Great Tribulation], “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. (vv. 29–31)

Now, Paul says virtually the same thing as Jesus, using the terminology of Daniel:

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

Scripture says that when Christ returns with the clouds of heaven, the Ancient of Days gives to him ... the kingdom. John says in Revelation 11:15,

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.’

And the seventh trumpet of Revelation is the last trumpet. And this is what Paul ... elsewhere tells us ... will occur at the last trumpet.

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:50–52)

And we also learn from Daniel ... that when Christ returns ... he will destroy the Beast ... and cast him into the lake of fire.

“Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body

**destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire”
(Daniel 7:11).**

Again, John mentions something similar in the book of Revelation.

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. (19:19, 20)

You may be interested Irenaeus, a church father¹, understood the Book of Revelation the same way.

¹ Irenaeus, (born c. 120/140, Asia Minor—died c. 200/203, probably Lyon; Western feast day June 28; Eastern feast day August 23), bishop of Lugdunum (Lyon), Apologist, and leading Christian theologian of the 2nd century. His work *Adversus haereses* (Against Heresies), written about 180, was a refutation of gnosticism.

As indeed many Christian scholars and theologians have done through the centuries.

He made clear that when the Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world ... the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds ... in the glory of the Father ... sending the antichrist into the lake of fire ...

And ... in case you are in any doubt about the consistency of Scripture on this point ... Paul wrote to the Thessalonians and described the scene this way:

The lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

So ... friends ... that is why in the lectionary ... today is called Christ the King. He is King indeed. King of kings and Lord of lords.

Now, shortly, on the first Sunday in December ... is the First Sunday in Advent ... a season when we focus on God coming to us ... as a baby ... in Bethlehem ... Immanuel ... the incarnation.

And I think the writers of the lectionary just wanted to make sure ... that we understand very clearly ... that Jesus is more than a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes:

he is one like the Son of Man ...

he is Christ the King ...

proclaimed throughout both the Old and New Testaments ...

and heralded down through the centuries of church history.

AMEN