

REALLY, KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON

DANIEL 7:1-28

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Sermon Introduction

I'm sure many of you are familiar with the slogan "Keep Calm and Carry On".

What many of you may not be familiar with ... is its history.

It was a slogan to motivate the British public amid the impending world war.

What fascinates me is their choice of placing the royal crown on top of the text.

It signifies the assurance that the British public are to have even amid the impending war: as long as their King rules, they can keep calm and carry on.

As Christians, we are also involved in all kinds of ongoing battles.

But unlike the British king who comes and goes, we can really keep calm and carry on because our King is greater.

Scripture Introduction

I understand that you recently completed a sermon series from First Thessalonians and currently in Second Thessalonians; and quite recently, a series from Joel.

Daniel chapter 7 is one of the best OT passages that talks about the second coming of Christ.

The temptation when reading prophetic books that look into the future [like Daniel] is to speculate what this animal and what that metal symbolizes.

But if we do that, we often miss the point and the purpose of the author of the book.

Nothing can affirm [or deny] our speculations. And we're not even sure if the original audience actually understood the symbolisms.

As such, rather than wasting time in unverifiable speculations, perhaps it's way better to focus on the big idea of the book and the main point of the passage.

The big idea of the whole book of Daniel is that **God is in control over worldly powers.**

And the main point of this chapter is that **God is in control even amid intensifying opposition.**

While Joel's purpose is to call God's people to return to God, to look forward to the promise of full restoration by God's Spirit who will come to all kinds of people,

Daniel's purpose is **to encourage God's people to hope in the sovereign God when opposition is intensifying.**

I hope that Joel series has been helpful to persuade you to refocus your love to Christ who has sealed you with His Spirit (if you are Christians). And I pray that Daniel chapter 7 will help you to hope in the right thing ... when you are tempted to hope in yourself, or in the most influential, the most trendy things out there in the world, or when you are tempted to give up Christ.

I pray that you will put your hope in Christ.

Before going to the text proper, we'll start with an overview of Daniel.

It's written to God's people (Judah, to be precise) who were in Babylonian exile up to when Persia conquered Babylon and took over the people under Persian rule.

Daniel served under four kings, chronologically: Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, Belshazzar of Babylon, Darius of Persia, and Cyrus of Persia.

But the book is only partially chronological.

Chapters 1 to 6 are chronological, primarily narratives with prophecies sprinkled in them.

Chapters 7 to 12 break the chronology, and are primarily prophecies that foretell the future (may not be our future, but the future from Daniel's perspective).

Because of this, take note that our text today (chapter 7) is not chronologically after chapter 6.

The timestamp in verse 1, "*Belshazzar king of Babylon*", helps us to understand that this was around the time of chapter 5 when King Belshazzar ruled Babylon.

So, if you read chapter 5, 6, and 7 sequentially, remember that when you're done with chapter 6 and starting with chapter 7, it's chronologically a flashback to a time in chapter 5.

You can follow along using the outline in the sermon note.

I. Kingly opposition against God and His people

A. Its escalating intensity (vv. 1-8, 15-18)

Look at verses 1-8:

¹In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. ²Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. ³And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. ⁴The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. ⁵And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.' ⁶After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. ⁷After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. ⁸I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

All these while ... in the book of Daniel it has been the kings who have visions and Daniel who interprets their visions.

This time it's different: it's Daniel who has visions.

The vision starts with “*the four winds of heaven*” and “*four great beasts*”.

Ancient Mesopotamian culture (which is roughly the present-day Syria, Iraq, and Iran) sees the symbolism “four” as the four corners of the earth (or essentially the whole world known to them).

To them, “*the four winds of heaven*” that “*were stirring up the great sea*” and “*four great beasts*” that “*came up out of the sea*” are simply a prelude to what they understand as “world powers” that shall stir up the world as they knew it.

From verse 4 onwards we’ll familiarize ourselves with the “*four great beasts*”.

“*The first was like a lion and had eagles’ wings.*” (animal)

Verse 5: “*a second one, like a bear.*” (animal)

Verse 6 - the third one: “*like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back.*” (animal)

The fourth beast is interesting.

Verse 7 simply describes it as “*terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong.*”

The fourth beast is different from the rest of the beasts in that it’s not described as an animal.

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Still in verse 7, there’s a mention that the fourth beast had “*ten horns*”,

which is then followed up in verse 8: “*there came up among them (meaning: **the ten horns**) another horn, a little one*”, the eleventh horn.

This eleventh horn is described as having “*eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.*”

“A little horn speaking great things” should give us a hint that there is something unproportional here, something out of order.

It’s not the first time that the symbolism “four” appears in Daniel.

Chapter 2 speaks of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of “a huge statue” made of four different metals.

There, Daniel interpreted it to be four successive earthly kingdoms before a final one that shall stand forever.

This gives us some pointer to interpret the symbolism “four” in chapter 7, that perhaps it’s also talking about four successive earthly kingdoms.

We can be thankful because the Bible not only gives us pointers on how to interpret, it gives us the interpretation.

Let’s jump to verses 15 to 18:

<sup>15</sup>“As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. <sup>16</sup>I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. <sup>17</sup>“These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. <sup>18</sup>But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.”

Indeed, the symbolism “four” in our text means the same (or at least roughly the same) as that in chapter 2. It’s talking about four successive earthly kingdoms.

And just like in chapter 2 where all four kingdoms will be destroyed and replaced with a kingdom that “*shall stand forever*”, our text also talks about a final kingdom.

This final kingdom shall be "*forever and ever*".  
All these, we don't have to speculate.

However, we have to go into a slight speculation to help us understand what it meant for God's people back then before we consider what it means to us now.

Bible-believing Christians throughout centuries have understood the *four beasts* in our text to be parallel to the four different metals from head to toe in chapter 2.

The first kingdom refers to ... Babylon, which Judah was currently under for decades.

Indeed, a lion with eagles' wings is a well-known symbol of the ancient Babylonian empire.

Remember that these visions came to Daniel when God's people were still in Babylonian exile.

The second kingdom refers to ... Persia, or to be exact: Medo-Persia, which is an alliance between Media and Persia.

This is less of a speculation because if we quickly turn to chapter 5 when Daniel interprets an inscription to Belshazzar, verse 28: "*PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.*"

This matches the description in our text verse 5: "*It was raised up on one side*", indicating that one is bigger than the other.

In the Medo-Persia alliance, Persia is the stronger side.

Although the Persian empire was favorable towards God's people, they soon realized that not only were they submitting to a Pagan ruler, they were also never to reach the glory they used to have before the exile.

The third kingdom refers to ... Greece.

This is also less of a speculation because in three different chapters following chapter 7 (chapters 8, 10, and 11), Greece is mentioned explicitly.

So all this ... is a reasonable interpretation.

Some Evangelical scholars believe that the fourth kingdom refers to ... Rome.

I think it certainly includes Rome at minimum,

but because the fourth beast is described differently from the other three, I think the fourth beast refers to ... all kingdoms that oppose Christ.

Or in other words, anti-Christ's ... with a lowercase "a", plural, and without the article "the".

You don't have to agree with the interpretation of the *four beasts*, whether they are Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, anti-Christ governments, or something else.

The point of this vision is that God's people in exile, their situation is really bad under Babylon, unfortunately it's not going to get any better soon.

After the exile is over, there are at least three more oppressive rulers they have to live through, one after another.

Friends, we're all exiles in this world.

This world is our home, but it's not our final home.

But it's especially hard to be a minority-group in a nation.

You are a religious minority in Indonesia.

I used to be one of you.

Having been away from Indonesia for two decades now, I can't say for sure I understand your struggles being a religious minority.

Perhaps you are going through severe persecution just like Judah under Babylon.

You come from another religious background and now your family and friends are treating you differently.

Or perhaps you are going through a more subdued persecution like Judah under Persia.

You are generally well but some government rulings are not in your favor.

Whichever struggle you may be facing, it's always tempting for us to pursue quick fixes.

They can take many forms.

It can take the form of political activism to push for a certain government.

It can also take the form of compromising to gain favor from an existing government;

anyway, if we can't beat them, we join them, right?

If you have a more of Western mindset, you may think that more conservatism will resolve the problems, or perhaps more liberalism.

If you are rooted in your Indonesian heritage, perhaps you think that the first presidential dynasty did well, or perhaps you love this current dynasty and you want it to continue, or perhaps you think that we should do away with all these dynasties.

The truth in our present reality that we should see from our passage is that ...

no human dynasty lasts forever.

That's the whole point.

Just to be clear, I'm not suggesting that political activism or engagement is bad.

If anything, our passage is telling us that just like Judah living in Babylon had two citizenships: Babylonians and Judeans, we all have two citizenships: this world (Indonesians or ???) and God's Kingdom.

It's commendable to take part in things that restore the wellbeing of people.

But when our ultimate hope for restoration lies with the government, when our ultimate goal is restoration now, I may not necessarily call it "bad", but it's wayyy lacking.

In fact, we might not actually understand that there's a greater hope and a greater restoration promised to us, or perhaps we have forgotten?

So yes, feel free to take part in political activism, in cultural engagement, but always remember to check our heart, our motive.

Is our heart trusting in something that will soon be replaced by another?

Is our motive: establishing heavens on earth?

Friends, have you ever considered that the local church (your local church) is a foretaste of heavens on earth?

Take seriously that your church is a place of refuge for the weary.

Take seriously treating newcomers graciously and generously.

Take seriously that your church is the place where they learn and experience the good news of Jesus Christ.

Be intentional to bring the people outside into the church that they may know the better hope and the better restoration they won't find in the world.

Friends, make sure that your local church is a faithful embassy of heavens on earth and make sure you invite people to taste and see heavens through your church, through you all (you are the church).

## B. The resulting suffering (vv. 19-25)

Let's turn to verses 19-25:

<sup>19</sup> "Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet, <sup>20</sup> and about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up and before which three of them fell, the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions. <sup>21</sup> As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, <sup>22</sup> until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom. <sup>23</sup> "Thus he said: 'As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces. <sup>24</sup> As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings. <sup>25</sup> He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.

I think I have offered enough speculation about Babylon, Persia, Greek, and all anti-Christ governments, although I believe that is a reasonable interpretation taught for many centuries by many bible-believing Christians.

So, I seriously encourage you to accept that interpretation, or at least consider it seriously.

But I won't speculate who are the kings symbolized in this section about the one king who "*shall put down three kings*".

Not that I don't want to, but I really don't know who those kings are.

But I'm thankful that without knowing the identity of every single symbolism, we can still understand the point.

The point here is that even beyond all the oppression and humiliation that Babylon, Persia, Greek, have brought to God's people, the following rulers will cause suffering to God's saints.

Coming back to the eleventh horn, the king I don't know who, the little horn that "*spoke great things*", it's clear to us now that "*great things*" here ... is not a good thing, but (verse 25) "*words against*" God, and "*wear out*" God's saints.

The idea that this fourth beast (specifically the little horn) is anti-Christ gets clearer here (not necessarily the anti-Christ, but at least an anti-Christ).

Not only is he opposed to Christ, he will oppress Christians.

Friends, it's one thing to know that persecution is intensifying.

But it's another to experience the suffering personally, especially if suffering comes from people in authority.

Oh beloved saint, if you have been suffering, press on.

Press on because there is good news for you, even in Daniel chapter 7 that sounds depressing so far.

But before we get to the good news, we have to confront the reality of this broken world and even our own sinful tendencies.

In our still yet-to-be glorified state, we don't always respond well to our sufferings.

Although it may be true that we are victims, do we adopt the worldly mindset of victimhood?

It's when ... instead of addressing the heart of the issue (perhaps the culprit), we start to blame anyone who doesn't perfectly understand how we feel.

Or perhaps because the culprit is untouchable, we start to blame anyone who is like the culprit.

It's especially dangerous when such things happen in a local church.

On the outside it may seem like a simple case of a sufferer needing support, which is a good need, but at the heart of it, it may be a root of divisiveness.

So friends, in our sufferings we must still love our brothers and sisters.

Our sufferings may very well be hard, but the church belongs to Christ.

He died for her, for these people.

Rather than shifting blames, let these brothers and sisters point you to the good news of Christ.

Let them speak to you, let them help you.

They may not perfectly meet your needs, but it's okay, they're not supposed to.

Christ is supposed to do that for you.

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Another temptation is ... to give up.

"It's too hard, I'll just give up my faith and join the majority."

I can relate to the temptation. It's not easy.

But if you give up now, at what cost?

The Bible is real, in the sense that it's historical and it speaks true things.

Jesus was walking on earth 2,000 years ago.

He died and rose again on the third day,

the only person in the history of mankind to have died and risen again and to never die again, proving that he's not just a human, but also God.

In fact, He'll come again.

If you were here last week, I believe you might have heard from Second Thessalonians chapter 1 that everyone who does not believe in Him "*will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony (Paul's testimony) to you was believed.*"

That is true, friends.

There's a great reward (not a reward that's just temporary like all the rewards the world offers, but a reward that's eternal: joy with the Lord).

So don't give up.

II. God's reign over puny kingly opposition (vv. 9-12, 26-28)

We have seen so far that opposition against God and His people has been escalating and causing much suffering to God's people.

So far it's been gloomy. And we're constantly tempted to respond in worldly ways.

But here's the good news.

Point number two: "God's reign over puny kingly opposition".

Look at verses 11-12:

⁹"As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire.

¹⁰ A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

¹¹ "I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

Moving on to verses 26 to 27:

²⁶ But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. ²⁷ And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.'

The beasts may indeed be terrifying for us.

Verse 2 tells us that they stir up the great sea.

And we've seen that they are causing so much havoc in the world.

We rightly fear the beasts.

But as we see verse 9, we see that the Ancient of Days, God, took his seat.

Unlike the *four beasts* who "*came up out of the sea*",

God has no origin and no end.

God is.

Taking a seat in the Bible is always a picture of being in control.

God is not panicking.

God is not surprised.

God is not troubled.

God is not reacting.

He sits.

Steady.

While we rightly fear the beasts, it's even more appropriate to fear God.

While our circumstances make us anxious, the almighty God in control of all things is the one we must trust.

God is steady but He's not indifferent about the beasts.

The end of verse 10: "*the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.*"

God is going to judge, because He is the One who holds the books of life and He is the Righteous Judge.

Look at the end of verse 9 onwards : *“his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him;”*

The beasts may be fierce, but God is holy. His fire can simply destroy them.

The end of verse 11: *“the beast (the fourth one, the worst one) was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire.”*

God defeats the worst of the beasts.

Verse 12 : even the dominion of the rest of the beasts have been taken away.

But *“their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.”*

This reminds me of the snake in the Bible: both the serpent at the beginning (Genesis chapter 3) and the dragon at the end (Revelation chapter 20).

When you struck the head of a snake, it's dead but its tail still whips around as a final form of retaliation before its inevitable destruction.

A. The everlasting dominion of the Son of Man (vv. 13-14)

Let's turn to verses 13-14:

¹³“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

God is almighty and in control of all things.

But because He's unseen, it's hard to relate to God, isn't it?

But God is gracious.

Not only has He given us His Word, the second person of Godhead has become a human like us.

Verse 13 describes Him as *“one like a son of man”*.

He is not a man in that he is created like us.

But He is a man in that he has a physical appearance like us.

Unlike us, He is presented before God and doesn't perish.

Because He is not just a man but also God.

To this one (*“who is like a son of man”*) an everlasting dominion (which shall not pass away, which shall not be destroyed) shall be given.

Who is He?

If you're a Christian, you know the answer.

But if you're here because someone brought you here, I'm glad that you're here with us.

You may resonate with the earlier points about how living in this world is filled with oppression and sufferings.

We feel you.

But we have hope because all these things are not just random, not just a natural course of events, but God has intervened in our history.

The “*one who is like a son of man*” is Jesus Christ.

Jesus who is still an unknown future to Daniel but in God’s mercy, God has revealed Jesus to Daniel as the “*one who is like a son of man*”.

But Jesus is a past history to us.

His perfect life, His unfair death, His miraculous resurrection, and His incomprehensible ascension are historical facts witnessed by hundreds of people.

There’s only one person in history who has died, risen again, and never to die again.

It may be a good idea to listen to him.

He said He’ll come back again to restore the world.

And He calls us to trust Him;

that means to leave our old lives and follow Him.

Jesus is the one who shall have the eternal dominion.

Who’s ruling Indonesia, who’s ruling the world right now, is not as important as the fact that Jesus is the Lord of lords and the King of kings.

Friends, consider Jesus.

I’d love to chat with you after this if you’d like to learn more about Jesus.

How do we know the “*one who is like a son of man*” is Jesus?

If we quickly turn to the Gospel of Mark chapter 14 when the priests are trying to find fault with Jesus, they can’t find any ... until verse 62 when Jesus claims that He is the son of man.

Only then, the priests could positively accuse Jesus of blasphemy,

because in claiming to be the son of man, Jesus implicitly claims to be God who shall have eternal dominion.

Friends, how is this good news for us?

God’s sovereignty has been revealed in His sacrificial love, not only in becoming like us, but in giving His life for us that we may have, not just a normal life, or even an abundant life now, but a life ... in Him ... forever and ever.

“In Him” because His sacrificial death ... unites us with Himself.

“Forever and ever” because He is God who is forever and ever.

If we are Christians, we have a life “in Him” now and “forever and ever”.

But friends, this is a period of waiting.

The Bridegroom is away, and we are waiting for His return.

The wait can be painful, but the wait is worth it.

Verse 18 : “*the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.*”

Verse 27 : “*the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.*”

And the most mind-blowing for me, verse 22 : “*until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.*”

Friends, we shall possess the eternal kingdom, and we should be looking forward to it even now. And more than that, we “*will judge the world*” (First Corinthians chapter 6 verse 2).

We? Judge the world?

What an honor.

The wait is worth it.

Friends, this is why we have all the instructions you have well heard from First Thessalonians.

Chapter 4 :

We shall now pursue sexual purity, because when Christ our Bridegroom returns He'll want to see us pure, sanctified for Him.

We shall now pursue brotherly love, because not only we should be helpful to each other's sanctification, we wouldn't want to be a stumbling block to others when Christ returns.

We shall now grief, but with eternal hope ... that those in Christ shall be resurrected and we'll be with them again.

Chapter 5 :

We shall now live normally, but with the constant reminder that Christ shall come anytime.

We shall now respect and esteem our church leaders, because their work is one that helps us in our sanctification ... that we may be presented blameless when Christ returns.

We shall now admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all, because each of us is unique and we require different means of sanctification as we await Christ's return.

We shall now rejoice, pray without ceasing, and give thanks for all God-ordained circumstances, because we know Christ is coming again to restore and vindicate us.

We shall now test everything, so that we're not misled and strayed as we wait for Christ's return.

Conclusion

HMCC, today we have learned that even amid escalating opposition against God and His people causing much suffering, God is in control and Christ (our Lord and Savior) rules.

I hope I have shown you that even prophetic passages with lots of symbolism like this one, are actually not as complicated as we like to think.

At least we don't have to make it more complicated than it really is.

The final verse, verse 28 :

²⁸ “Here is the end of the matter. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart.”

To be honest with you, I had to consult ChatGPT:

“Why was Daniel still terrified even after knowing that the ending is favorable to God's people?”

ChatGPT offered a few possibilities, but I think the answer is because Daniel and God's people were still amid oppositions, and still many more to come.

He is not under the illusion that everything is alright just because the son of man will eventually come to restore them.

Friends, we are still living amid many oppositions.

What we need to press on is the good news, not worldly positive thinking.

The good news is not a “make-believe” that makes as if everything is alright.

The saying is true: “Keep Calm and Carry On”.

The saying is true: “Everything will be alright”.

But those sayings are true ... only if we know the end, and the correct end;

when we have the better hope and know of the better restoration.

That yes: “Keep Calm and Carry On, because Christ has won the battle for us and He shall return.”

That yes: “Everything will be alright, because God is in complete control of all things for our good.”

So friends, press on.

Really, keep calm and carry on, because Christ (the rightful crown-bearer) rules and shall tangibly rule when He returns.

Let's pray.