

Violence has an End

Sermon for Ascension Day

Sermon Text: Daniel 7:1-14



In 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. ² Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. ³ And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. ⁴ The 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. ⁵ And 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.' ⁶ After 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. ⁷ After 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. ⁸ I 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. 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. 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. ¹⁴ And 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.

It only takes about half an hour to walk from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives. That's not a very far distance. And yet the way was not an easy walk in the hot Israeli sun, so Jesus' disciples came panting and groaning to their destination, resting on a rock to brush the sand from their sandals and wiping the sweat from their foreheads; because they wanted to calmly consider what was about to happen. It was already clear to them that they had come to a special moment with Jesus. It was always like that when Jesus went to the Mount of Olives with His disciples. Something very important happened. Just as when Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive the 10 Commandments, the disciples would now receive something important from Jesus. And that's why Peter wanted to know from the very beginning

whether the time would now come when God would destroy all enemies and establish His kingdom of peace. Peter and the other disciples thought about the text from Daniel chapter 7 in the Old Testament because it happened the same way there. After many terrible kingdoms that are represented as animals by Daniel, God came as a judge and the Son of man and put an end to it all. The Son of man is a human being, but unlike all other human beings, He is allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. The Son of man, therefore, shares in the kingdom of God, even though He is a man. This person is Jesus. Jesus had often introduced Himself as this Son of Man from Daniel 7. And the evil beasts collectively pointed to political kingdoms that ruled at the time. The vision of Daniel wants to show that the kingdoms appeared with horrible brutality and strength but were constantly conquered by other kingdoms. These kingdoms were not of God. Daniel explains that they came from the sea. At that time, the sea was a symbol for evil and the evil powers bubbled forth from this sea. So here it's not about something that God made because when God makes something, He only says one word and it happens. Here, it's about an unholy process that excels, kills, and hurts. Peter and the disciples thought of the Roman empire that ruled with terrible cruelty at that time. But one can also think about modern kingdoms. Not that long ago, the Nazi Regime held the entire world in fear and terror. After that came the Soviet Union and after that, America was the strongest country. Right now we talk about China as the newest world power. And in the meantime, we are constantly overtaken by new crises, wars, and catastrophes. The terrible destruction, bloodshed, and cruelty in Ukraine are just some examples of many. All these world kingdoms must come and go. Daniel comes to a simple conclusion: they are not of God and that's why they must be done away with. In the end, God will destroy them collectively and their power will have an end. In the end, only God will remain, only His Kingdom will remain, and right there in the middle of this judgment stands the Son of man. Jesus stands in the midst of it all. Jesus is the key to everything that happens around us. Jesus is the key to the history of the world and the universe. He is a man but He can do more than other people. He is not like the prophet Isaiah who is only allowed to proclaim the Word of God after a severe trial by fire. The Son of man may not only proclaim the Word of God, He is Himself the cornerstone of God's judgment. He is right there in the middle and yet human. Humanity and God come together in this Son of Man. Humanity and God come together in Jesus.

When Jesus was with His disciples on the mountain, the disciples might have thought that this was exactly that time now. Longingly, they looked toward heaven and hoped for this time. They were downright excited for it! But Jesus waved it aside and the angels that appeared after Jesus ascended into heaven did the same. No one can or could have guessed when this Last Judgment would occur. The future was supposed to look different than the disciples suspected. Peter and the other disciples hadn't received the Holy Spirit at that time so they had no idea what it means to be a Christian. And Jesus became silent too – He had a much longer way to go than the 30 minutes up to the Mount of Olives. And where did the journey go for Jesus? He should be exalted? He should sit at the right hand of the Father? In a confirmation class, one student once said: "Jesus had to eventually go back to His Father because He hadn't seen Him for so long. After all, He had to rest from all the stress here on earth." I can understand this answer from the mouth of a child very well. Especially when I think about the terrible things people did to Jesus. There was really no place for Jesus here on earth. And He really had no peace here and must have been happy to be with His Father again. And yet His Ascension doesn't mean that Jesus is now gone. Quite the opposite. Jesus should be even closer to us than ever before. "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age," Jesus promised His disciples. So on Ascension, it's not at all about Jesus leaving us to be with the Father again. No, God Himself would not be far away now. God Himself would come to us through the Holy Spirit and live with us. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus would

be even closer to us than before. He would not only be with some people in Jerusalem, but He would also be with us in our homes. He wants to go all over the world. He also wants to come into your home and into mine. But that doesn't mean that we will no longer have any problems. The terrible atrocities that Daniel saw, happened to Christians. Even the disciples of Jesus had to experience horrible things in their lives. Just as the world is against Jesus, it is also against the disciples of Jesus. Jesus didn't say that the world would get better and better. He said the exact opposite – it would get worse. And wickedness shall prevail on earth. And yet Jesus says to us that we Christians will not stand helpless when facing these powers. Jesus promised His disciples: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." That's why we believe and why we're allowed to be here.

Ten days after Ascension, this same Holy Spirit came upon the disciples. And that was the power that went all around the world and reached all people from every culture. It took the disciples a little while after the Ascension to go to Jerusalem. The message that they were allowed to proclaim still hasn't stopped for over 2000 years. Kingdoms usually have a shelf-life of several decades...sometimes less. A satellite orbits the earth in 90 minutes. And they are all in God's wise hands. *His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.* Amen.