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By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
Daniel 2:24-49

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English Standard Version

“The Revelation of Mystery”

This is the 3rd sermon in the series on the book of Daniel entitled,
“A Broken World and a Sovereign God.”

Daniel 2:24-49

“Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: “Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation.”

²⁵ *Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste and said thus to him: “I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation.”*

²⁶ *The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, “Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?”* ²⁷ *Daniel answered the king and said, “No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked,* ²⁸ *but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these:* ²⁹ *To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and He who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be.* ³⁰ *But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.*

³¹ *“You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening.* ³² *The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze,* ³³ *its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.* ³⁴ *As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.* ³⁵ *Then the iron, the clay,*

the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

³⁶ *“This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. ³⁷ You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, ³⁸ and into whose hand He has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold. ³⁹ Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. ⁴⁰ And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. ⁴¹ And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. ⁴² And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. ⁴³ As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. ⁴⁴ And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, ⁴⁵ just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.”*

⁴⁶ *Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. ⁴⁷ The king answered and said to Daniel, “Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.” ⁴⁸ Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. ⁴⁹ Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king’s court.”*

Heavenly Father, once again we have come to Your Word and we ask that You would enable us to come with ears that hear and hearts that are open to receive. We ask that by the power of the Holy Spirit, You enable us to understand what is happening in this text, and what is the truth to be found here that You want us to hear and understand and respond to in faith. Do this in and for each of us, this morning, in Jesus’ name, and for His glory, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: *Here Today but Gone Tomorrow* ¹

¹ The Introduction is adapted from the email devotional “Lessons on Living” by Woodrow Kroll, www.backtothebible.org, 5/11/02. The picture is taken from www.sacred-destinations.com.



The Duomo in Milan, Italy is the second largest Christian church in the western world, second only to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Started in 1386 and finished in 1510, it was built to hold the entire population of Milan ... at the time some 40,000 people. It's covered with magnificent carvings and statues in brilliant white marble. It's amazing to look at and one is left speechless at its beauty.

Several huge gates (giant bronze doors) lead into the great Cathedral. Over each gate is a Latin inscription in marble. Over one gate is an inscription under a beautiful floral bouquet that says, "*The things that please us are temporary.*" Over another gate is a cross with the inscription, "*The things that disturb us are temporary.*" Over the central gate, however, is a large inscription that says, "*The things that are important are eternal.*"

As Daniel shared with Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation of the king's dream, he revealed that God had shown him that many kingdoms would rise and fall. As mighty and magnificent as Babylon was under the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, it would someday be replaced by another magnificent kingdom. Yet even this kingdom would come to an end, and others would rise after it. Finally, however, God would set up His kingdom, which would last forever.

It's so easy to get caught up in things that are here today but gone tomorrow. They look so solid and permanent, yet they are temporary and inconsequential. Thus, we find ourselves chasing changing fads and grasping at straws as they are blown about by the wind. Only when we fix our hearts and minds on the things of God do we find true stability.

Neither the things that please you nor the things that disturb you last forever. Fix your mind on things that are above and invest in things that are eternal ... because when you look to God and His kingdom, you look to what really matters.

And that's the point of this passage. But before we get too far into the text, we need to be

reminded of the context, and of course, the context of this book is ...

BACKGROUND: *The Babylonian Exile*²

The Babylonian exile is one of two defining events in the history of Israel, with the Exodus being the other. God brought about the Babylonian exile as a means of God's **judgment** because of **unfathomable**, repeated sin. And that's where this story starts.

You see, by the year 605 B.C., **six centuries before Christ**, the deportation to Babylon had already begun. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, a Chaldean by blood, had an expansionist plan to take over as much of the Ancient Near Eastern world as he could ... and Jerusalem was one of his first targets.

This exile was, in fact, according to God's own prophets, **His punishment** against Israel's sin and rebellion. That is **a key**, by the way, to understanding the whole book of Daniel and his view of the sovereignty of God. The exile into Babylon ... the captivity into which the children of Israel began to be taken in 605 B.C. ... is where our story starts.

The Book of Daniel is both familiar and unfamiliar to most Christians. The stories of Daniel in the Lion's Den and of Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego in the fiery furnace are still fairly well-known even in an age of Biblical illiteracy.

And so we've all been taught that Daniel is about how to live faithfully in the midst of an unbelieving culture. And that's true – Daniel does teach that. **But that's NOT the main point of the Book of Daniel.** We see that, somewhat, in the first six chapters of Daniel, but the last six chapters are a series of **apocalyptic visions** that are meant to **encourage** believers living in hostile times.

We're going to be reminded that there is the One greater than Daniel, the One who perfectly lived the exilic life of service and separation for us, the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, the high point of the Book of Daniel comes in chapter 7 with a heavenly vision of the exalted Son of Man who took flesh among us in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Book of Daniel is not about us, and it's not about Daniel, but it's about **a Sovereign God and the coming of the Kingdom.**

To recap the events of Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had a dream. He summoned his wise men to interpret the dream for him but refused to tell them what the dream was. They declared this task impossible, because the gods who give such dreams don't live among men and don't reveal these mysteries to men. In his rage at their inability to interpret his dream, Nebuchadnezzar sentenced all the wise men to death, which included Daniel and his friends. But when Daniel learned of this decree, he asked the king for more time and went to the Lord in prayer, seeking both the dream and its interpretation. The Lord answered his prayer and Daniel responded with praise for the God of Heaven.

This brings up to date, and so, with that in mind, let's continue our study of Daniel, chapter 2 by first seeing ...

v. 24-30: THE DREAM EXPLAINED³

"Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation." ²⁵ Then Arioch brought in Daniel

² The Background is adapted from *Daniel: Reformed Expository Commentary* by Dr. Ian Duguid, pages 3-16.

³ The Outline is taken from "Daniel" by Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, pages 1334-1337. The rest of the sermon is largely adapted from Duguid, pages 31-44.

before the king in haste and said thus to him: “I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation.”²⁶ The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, “Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?”²⁷ Daniel answered the king and said, “No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked,²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these:²⁹ To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and He who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be.³⁰ But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.”

First of all, we should note Daniel’s manner in approaching the king, which is to deflect all credit from himself to the Lord. Daniel’s humility here is contrasted with Arioch, the commander of the king’s guard. Arioch takes some credit for what’s about to happen, verse 25, “I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation.”

Actually, Arioch did nothing of the sort. He was ready to execute Daniel along with the rest of the wise men. And it was Daniel who went and found Arioch, not the other way around. Yet Arioch was eager to claim some of the credit. And that’s the way the world works, isn’t it? Pass on the blame and claim the credit, regardless of who actually did the work.

But when Nebuchadnezzar asks Daniel about this, verse 26, “Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?” Daniel could have easily said “yes” and claimed the credit for himself. But instead he says, verses 27-28, “No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked,²⁸ **but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.**”

Instead of promoting himself, Daniel took the opportunity to publicly exalt the God of Heaven as “**the revealer of mysteries,**” verses 29-30, *To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and He who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be.*³⁰ *But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.*”

There’s a model here for all of us in our relationships with folks who don’t know God. In contrast to the self-promoting way of the world, which many Christians seem to excel at, we should be alert for opportunities to publicly praise and exalt the God of Heaven. The Biblical word for this attitude is humility: the perspective that sees our true size in comparison with the surpassing greatness of our God. It is this sort of sincere humility that we see in Daniel’s life

But Daniel doesn’t stop by merely telling of God’s greatness, but goes on to prove it when we see ...

v. 31-35: THE DREAM RECITED

“You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening.³² The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze,³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.³⁴ As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the

image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. ³⁵ *Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.*

Daniel then recounts to Nebuchadnezzar his dream, which was precisely what his Babylonian wise men claimed was impossible. The dream was actually quite simple, and yet at the same time incredibly profound. What Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream was an enormous statue of man ... made up of four parts. You have an insert in your bulletin that shows one possible image of what this might have looked like. There's a better image up here on one of the banners that Louise Gross made for this series.

This statue had a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, torso and thighs of bronze, and legs of iron with feet of iron mixed with clay. While Nebuchadnezzar was watching, a rock was cut out but not by human means. The rock struck the statue on its feet, and the whole thing disintegrated into pieces, which the wind blew away. Meanwhile the rock grew into a huge mountain and filled the earth.

And that was the dream, strange and exciting at the same time. Then, having described the dream, Daniel goes on and presents the king with ...

v. 36-45: THE DREAM INTERPRETED

"This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. ³⁷ *You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory,* ³⁸ *and into whose hand He has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold.* ³⁹ *Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.* ⁴⁰ *And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these.* ⁴¹ *And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay.* ⁴² *And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle.* ⁴³ *As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay.* ⁴⁴ *And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever,* ⁴⁵ *just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."*

Daniel interprets the image of the statue as follows: the head of gold is Nebuchadnezzar himself, verse 37, *"to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory."* After Nebuchadnezzar's time, there would be more kingdoms. Most scholars identify these as Persia, Greece, and Rome — the other great kingdoms of the ancient world — as the diagram on your bulletin insert shows. But the truth is, we don't really know, **the text doesn't explicitly say**. It also belies a western-centric view of the world; there were certainly other great kingdoms in China, India, Africa, and Latin America.

And I think that to dwell too long on what the kingdoms are and what they did is to miss the point of the interpretation. Because in the interpretation that Daniel gives, which he received

from God, each of these kingdoms would be inferior to the one that went before it, though they would still be strong and powerful. The last of these kingdoms will be strong as iron, yet in the end it will prove to be an unstable composite that cannot hold together. At that time, God will establish His kingdom, which will ultimately destroy all other kingdoms. Though it starts small, it will grow to fill the earth and, unlike the earthly kingdoms, **it will endure forever.**

This passage gives us little data about the specifics of any of these kingdoms, because, I think, it intends to give us **a philosophy of history** rather than **a precise analysis of history**. The focus here is on **what** the future holds, not **when** it will take place. So ... what lessons are there to be learned **so far** ... from this complex and very different and difficult passage? What are the ...

APPLICATION: Lessons Learned

So, then, what does this passage seek to teach us?

Several things ... I think. But primarily, we see that ...

- **Empires Rise and Fall**

The glory and power of every earthly kingdom comes from God. It doesn't come about because of their own strength, but because God puts it into their hands. Verse 37 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar *"to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory."*

And yet, as we saw back in verse 21, *"He removes kings and sets up kings."*

One of the central features of this dream is that all worldly authorities are transient, they're temporal, they all have an end, they all have an **"after this."** No earthly kingdom last forever; the gold gives way to silver, the silver to bronze, the bronze to iron. The final kingdom in the sequence is not only inferior in glory to the first — iron compared to gold — but inferior in unity as well; it's iron mixed with clay, an uneven mixture that cannot hold together.

The one constant amongst all these earthly kingdoms is their lust for power. They all desire to dominate and rule, but in the end, all their ambitions are frustrated. The kingdoms of this world, however glorious or powerful they seem, all have "feet of clay" and will not stand.

The depiction of these changing and ultimately failing kingdoms stands in stark contrast to what replaces them. The Kingdom of God enters the chaos and hopelessness of human history and brings new hope to humanity. God gets the last word and it doesn't lie with a new and improved version of the statue of a man. Rather, it lies with something radical that God will do, verses 34-35, *"... a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces."³⁵ Then ... the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth."* God's Kingdom will be established, and through the power of God, grow to a great mountain, and become the kingdom that is forever and ever.

Even so, we should be careful **not** to let the future focus on the coming of the kingdom that we see in this passage obscure the message found here that we need to be serving the community here and now. It's not coincidental that the chapter ends with ...

v. 46-49: DANIEL HONORED

"Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him."⁴⁷ The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery."⁴⁸ Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.⁴⁹ Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over

the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court."

Daniel and his friends end up being promoted into positions of great responsibility in the Babylonian kingdom. These men didn't isolate themselves from the kingdom of this world as they waited for God to establish His kingdom; rather, they poured themselves into seeking the welfare of their temporary home in Babylon. They had the attitude of seeking the peace and prosperity of their present land ... even though it wasn't their land ... and it certainly wasn't the city of God.

And actually, this is exactly what the prophet Jeremiah told the exiles in Babylon to do when he wrote to them with a word from the Lord, **Jeremiah 29:5-7**, "*Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶ Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷ But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*"

We need to take way more seriously our duty to pursue the blessing of the earthly community in which we find ourselves. However, there's two dangers here. One is that we get so fixated on the return of Christ and the coming of His kingdom that we utterly ignore the world in which we live. We pay no attention to the culture and what it's doing to us, to our children, and to our community because we know it won't last.

On the other hand, many of us have made transforming our culture such an idolatrous pursuit that God has become secondary to us. We have forgotten that the world is not our home, that we're in exile here on earth, and our true citizenship is in Heaven. There is a city of God and a city of man and a faithful reading of the Bible doesn't allow us to disregard either of them.

And yet in the midst of serving God in this world, we cannot forget that our primary calling is to bow down in worship. This was Nebuchadnezzar's response, verses 46-47, "*Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face ... and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery."*

And that should be our response as well. As Handel's Messiah so gloriously reminds us, there's only one appropriate response to the declaration, "***For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.***" And that response is "***Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!***"

Once again, there's a final note that we **can't** afford to miss in all of this. And that's the reminder that Jesus is ...

CONCLUSION: *The Rock of God*

The rock in this picture is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus came proclaiming, **Mark 1:15**, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.*"

Then in Luke 20, Jesus told the parable of the son of the vineyard owner whom the tenants rejected and then killed. He then quoted **Psalm 118:22**, "*The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.*" He then added, **Luke 20:18**, "*Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.*" The last words in the parable implicitly come from Daniel 2, and by quoting them, Jesus was identifying Himself as Israel's Messiah, the stone which crushes the kingdoms of this world.

Jesus brings about the establishment of His kingdom through His rejection by man and His sacrificial death. The son of the vineyard owner in the parable of Luke 20 accomplishes his mission through dying. His kingdom is not like the kingdoms of this world. They advance by power and conquest, and they glory in their strength. The Kingdom of God advances through

suffering and death, led by Jesus' own death. And by that death, He brings life to all who come and bow down before Him, receiving entrance into His Kingdom as a free gift that comes **by** grace, **through** faith, **in** Christ the King.

And Jesus tells us that we are to, **Matthew 6:33**, "*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*"

There is a time coming when the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, **Revelation 11:15**, "*Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever."*

That's what the Book of Daniel's about. **This is a Gospel book and it's about the coming of the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.** Think about that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the coming of the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and we thank You that He shall reign forever and ever. As we continue to study Daniel over the next few months, we pray that You would enable us to live kingdom lives in a fallen and broken world, demonstrating the reign of Christ to those around us. And help us to look forward to that day when Christ shall return as King of kings and Lords of Lords. Help us to live faithfully here in exile while we wait for the final consummation of the kingdom, for we ask it in Jesus' name, and for His glory. Amen.

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1 Chronicles 29:11

"Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is Yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head above all."