

It has been quite some time since I have had an opportunity to teach on the book of Daniel. The last time was for a group of college students who wanted to return to the stories they learned growing up in Sunday School. Once we hit chapter seven, we were out of those teachings. For many, this is not a story that they knew was contained within the pages of the book of Daniel.

Chapter seven starts a series of four visions that Daniel has. All of a sudden, we shift from Daniel's present situation and context as a captive in Babylon serving the various administrations to an unknown time in the future.

Think back to the first week in this sermon series where we were in the second chapter of Daniel. Daniel offered to interpret the dream of the king, who had placed an odd demand on all of the wise people in Babylon - to tell him the interpretation of the dream only after they could tell him what the dream was in the first place. Of course, no one could so he was going to kill them all until Daniel intervened. In this chapter Daniel was telling the king what his dream was and what it meant. Now in chapter seven we have a shift and Daniel is the one having the dream. However, it still has to do with the same idea from chapter two - the rise and fall of human kingdoms that are replaced, ultimately, by God's everlasting Kingdom.

Daniel's dream was about four beasts - some which are recognizable and others that are not. The first beast looked like a lion, but had eagles' wings. This beast is known for its brute force that is absolutely uncontrollable, until its feathers are plucked off, and it becomes docile and human.

The second beast looked like a bear on its hind legs, but with tusks. It had come to devour other nations in conquest. Then a third sort of looked like a leopard, but with four wings and four heads, signifying the dominion that it held over other nations. The fourth beast couldn't even be described apart from the words terrifying and strong - it simply came to destroy as much as it could.

Each of the beast was a strange sign of the powers to come - probably represented by certain kings, none of whom are named. Throughout the years, scholars have made guesses about which kingdom each beast may represent, but the truth is what is more important is the twofold message that one, human power is limited but God's power reigns and remains and two, only God knows the timing of when this revelation will come to pass. We can guess, but in our humanness, we don't know the time.

What I appreciate about Daniel sharing his visions is that he does not do so in order to show off, make himself seem better than others, or to lift up his own name. In fact, he is troubled by the visions. Instead, he does so because he feels compelled to by God for God's purposes.

As we continue to journey with both the book of Daniel and Benedict on the path of Christian humility, the next step is prudence. This step goes against our inner desire to be different from others or to make a name for ourselves. Instead, we find our identity, in its fullness, in God alone.

Have you ever met someone who truly does not care for their own will to be done? I find that such saints are the people who give without expecting even a "thank you" in return. They are the ones who give in secret and give in abundance, not because they have a lot, but because they feel so blessed by God.

A few years ago, the custodian at the church I was serving passed away. She was beloved in the community, but it wasn't until after her passing that we truly realized just how much she

did for the church. Because she did it silently. Without seeking her own glory. And in doing so, she set an example in humility for all around her.

The next two steps in humility - silence and dignity - are meant to train us in patience. What a difficult word! I have yet to meet anyone who says that they excel in patience. And I am in awe of Daniel receiving this vision. If it was me - I would have all sorts of questions starting with "when, Lord?" But then again, I know that I am not a very patient person. I don't like the idea of enduring or not knowing. But it is only when I have the fruit from these two steps of seeking to live in a spirit of patience that I can speak to others with gentleness and be heard.

Even if in the midst of such a shocking dream, Daniel is truly a man of few words. Think about this, friends. If you had a dream like this, how long would it take you to explain it to someone? Probably not the few short minutes that it took us to read this scripture together today. We are people who like to be forceful and abundant with our words. We want people to hear us.

And if anyone should want someone to hear him, it's Daniel, who has been given this powerful vision from God!

Yet, he chooses his words carefully, and guided by God for the sake of God.

For the last several weeks I have been in a training about how to have conversations where we truly hear one another. Truly listen deeply. And the way that we do so is by setting out really simple rules and a pattern for sharing and listening that is easy to follow. The pattern is that there is a prompt - someone shares about it from their perspective for two minutes - then any can ask them a follow up question using the words "I'd be curious to know." But if their follow up question becomes too wordy or complicated or sounds like they are just sharing their opinion in the form of a question we stop and try again.

Why? Because all too often we don't ask questions to listen - we ask wordy questions to assert our own authority. We feel like the more words we speak the better off we look, but miss the point of shining the light of Christ through our word and our thoughtfulness with those words.

The final step of humility is that one bears their heart to God in all things and in all places - whether in prayer, work, service, or study.

There is one more aspect of the beasts that we didn't name before - the horns. The horns are a sign of strength and power, but they were also speaking arrogantly, which caused it to be plucked up.

The little horn and even the beasts, only had a heart for themselves. They wanted to make their presence and kingdom known. But Daniel showed a different way to live - not just in recalling this vision, but in all of the passages that we have looked at over this past month - as he sought to have the heart of God leading him.

Friends, as we end this series, I ask again - where are you on the journey of Christian humility? And by what heart is your life being led - one of your own making or one that follows Christ alone? Amen.