

What's the scariest dream you ever had? I'm sure we all could all tell about some dreams that would wow the rest of us, but let me tell you about a dream - actually a vision - that Daniel had from God. It started out with Daniel seeing a very powerful lion with wings. As if that wasn't scary enough, the lion was followed by a bear chewing on three ribs and hungry for more, which was followed by a four-headed leopard, which was followed by a beast with large iron teeth and 10 horns, and then another one appeared, uprooted three, and this horn had eyes and a mouth and it talked. Now that's a scary dream, but actually it had a very real meaning. Each beast represented an empire: the powerful empire of Babylon (the lion), followed by the ravenous empire of Persia (the bear), followed by the quick empire of Greece (the leopard), followed by the dreadful empire of Rome. Each of these empires had their turn at ruling the world, but then there was an almost unimpressive vision of a simple man who followed to rule over them all. That man was Jesus, our King, and he is: **A King Still Reigns!**

1. With all power 2. Over all people 3. For all time

Do you remember Daniel's zip code? It wasn't Jerusalem, it was Babylon, where he and many others had been carried into captivity. But don't picture the Israelites in jail or working as slaves. The Babylonians knew better than to wipe out the people they conquered. They would disperse them throughout the kingdom, merge them into the culture, and press them into service. The best and brightest, among them Daniel and his three friends, would go to Babylon, where they had a great life - built their own homes, had families, started businesses. So what was the problem? Just this: God said a Savior would come from a Jewish nation, but how could that happen when their nation looked like it was extinct and would be absorbed into a foreign culture. God also said that the Savior would be born in Judah, but how could that happen when the Israelites were 800 miles away from home? God's promise also spoke of hope and happiness, but how could that happen when there was nothing but spiritual sadness and despair. These were surely dark days for Daniel. That's why God gave this vision about powerful nations in succession. One message from that vision was this: "You think it's bad now living under the Babylonians? Just wait! The next world power and the next and the next will be more oppressive than the previous. Worse yet, people who are supposed to be spiritual leaders are going to come along, turn on you, and try to kill your souls with false doctrine." But in the midst of all that mess there was more to the vision: **"I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.** Obviously, since this coming one only looked like a man, he couldn't have looked like much, but that's because God's power is often hidden from the naked eye. True, the power of that Son of Mary was hidden for a time when he took on human form and was found lying in a manger. True, the power of that Son of Man was hidden for a time when he was traveling around Palestine as a poor preacher. True, the power of that Son of Man was hidden as Pontius Pilate poked fun at his claim to be a king. But there is method behind God's means. His power was hidden for a time so that he could feel our hurt as a human, so that he could take up our burden of living up to God's demand for a pure life, and so that he could take up the **"punishment that brought us peace"** and **"by his wounds we might be healed"** (Isaiah 53). In many ways, his power still remains hidden. But who do you think is behind the rise and fall of nations to this day? Who do you think has the power to forgive as it's hidden in the trickling of water from the font or in the taste of wafer and wine in his meal? Who do you think has the power to forgive every sin because he has paid for every sin? At the end, when we see the Son of Man as the King of kings, there will be a wow factor as his power will burst out for all to see, as we see the defeat of death, devil, and false doctrine. But how can we be sure that we will be safe and secure on that day?

“I am not worthy,” you might think to yourself. “I have nothing to offer, nothing to bring. I’m a sinful human being – I am too lowly to be a part of all this royalty and splendor and confusion.” Picture a homeless man on Thanksgiving this Thursday, knocking on the door of a mansion, and the door opens, and the homeless man says, “Can you spare a little food for me – I have nothing.” And the owner of the house – a generous man – says, “Why don’t you come in and join us?” And the homeless man looks into the house, and he sees the beautiful chandeliers. He sees that everyone there is dressed so nicely. He sees that everything is so clean and dignified and beautiful, and he says, “Oh, I can’t come in. Look at me – I don’t belong – I’m dirty. I’ve been living on the streets. I’m filthy. I have nothing to offer. I would ruin everything – just let me have a little food, and I’ll be on my way.” Is that how you feel, as you consider the fact that someday, you are going to be ushered into the presence of Christ the King? “I don’t belong there,” you might say. “I’ve been living in this sinful world. I’m spiritually filthy. I don’t belong. I have nothing to offer. I would ruin everything in heaven with my sin. I don’t belong there. How can I even dream of walking into the presence of Christ the King? But with Christ, you come, just as you are. Come with your sin. And Jesus will give you his holiness. Look at our Revelation reading for today, verse 4: “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.” Come with your sin, and Jesus will take it away. He has freed you from your sins by shedding his blood for you, on the cross. He loves you with the kind of love that you can’t earn – an undeserved love called “grace.” That’s how you approach the Master and Commander. Come as you are. Come with your sadness, and Jesus will give you joy. Come with your weakness, and Jesus will give you strength. Come with your worries and doubts, and Jesus will give you confidence. Come with nothing. Nothing but faith. Let the angel lead you into the great palace of the King of Kings. And when all the saints and angels look at you, don’t worry if you have nothing to offer. Don’t worry if you are a sinful man or a sinful woman. Come as you are – come just with your faith in Christ – and Jesus will give you everything.

There once was a woman named Charlotte Elliott, and she was interested in becoming a Christian. But how could I come to Christ, she wondered. I am so sinful, and he is so holy. I am so lowly, and he is so mighty. How can I come to him. And then a Christian minister said to her, “You have nothing of merit to bring to God. Just come as you are.”

All her life, Charlotte suffered from all kinds of illnesses. She was always so fatigued. It frustrated her that she was unable to help the cause of Christianity. She wanted to do something! But she was always so sick. “I have nothing to offer,” she thought. And this frustrated her and depressed her. But then she remembered the words of that minister from many years before – just come as you are. Whether you are sinful or sick, just come as you are. And so she wrote a hymn about her faith, and really, this hymn is about the faith of every Christian in this room. Look at verse one: “Just as I am, without one plea” – as you are ushered into the presence of Christ, there is nothing you can plea. “but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou bidd’st me come to thee” – that’s what we can hang onto as we stand before Christ on Judgment Day – his blood was shed for me, and he bids me to come into his presence.

What is interesting about that day is that all peoples, nations, and men of every language will worship Him. Whether they want to or not. Here’s a little geography lesson for you. The Babylonian kings extended the boundaries of the territory they controlled to include what today is Iraq, part of Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and part of Egypt. When the Persians took over, they controlled all of that, plus what is now Iran and all the rest of Turkey. The Greek armies swept through all that territory and went east almost to India. The Roman Empire went west all the way around the Mediterranean Sea and through what is now western Europe. But

none of those kingdoms included all people everywhere, and none of them would be considered Christian - not then, not today.

Do things look a whole lot different today? From our vantage point it may look like nations are still defying God. In fact, there are places on this planet where it is not even safe to be a Christian. Does that scare you? It scares me. And yet, thanks be to God there are Christians in nearly every country in this world, who boldly stand up for Jesus at the risk of losing their possessions, position, and property. And one day all believers will be united in one mighty chorus and every person who has ever lived will be forced to acknowledge that there is only one Savior God. I know that's hard to imagine how. You might have a hard time picturing Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden or Mahmoud Ahmadinejad bowing before Jesus and saying, "We never did believe in you, but obviously you are in charge, and we now bow before your judgment, but only to our shame." That is God's wow factor for us in his Word today: **"I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven...all people, nations, and people of every language worshiped him."** The Son of Man reigns over all people. Isn't that great?

3. For all time. Every one of the kingdoms in Daniel's vision not only was limited geographically, but also chronologically. Think of it: there is no more Babylonian, or Persian, or Greek, or Roman Empire. Think of something else. There are members here today who have seen other empires and powers come and go. Germany threatened the balance of power in Europe twice. About 65 years ago Japan launched an attack against Americans on American soil. Could some of us within our lifetime see the fall of America? Given the current spiritual status, which is many times a good barometer of a nation's success or failure, it wouldn't surprise me if I saw the fall of America as the world's superpower. But then again, I'm not a prophet. But Daniel was. Based on his vision we can say that one day the Middle East may not be the hot spot of the world. Some other country may be, and it may be raised up for God's purpose and then brought low. That may be true of our own beloved country. But nothing will stop the reign of the Son of Man. If you want stability in an unstable world, if you want something solid for the rocky road you're riding down, if you need consistency because everything seems to be passing too quickly and your own weakness and your own sin make you feel unsure about yourself, or maybe your sin has brought you low and made you feel defeated. If so, then listen to this wow factor from God's Word: **"I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven....His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."** The Son of Man reigns for all time. Isn't that great? Eventually the world will crumble, and only God's kingdom will last. Those who follow Christ are part of this unshakable kingdom, and they'll withstand the shaking, sifting, and burning that's going to come. When we begin to feel unsure about the future, as I'm sure we all do from time to time, we can take comfort from these verses. No matter what happens here, our future is built on a solid foundation that can't be destroyed. Today we celebrate Christ as our King! In Jesus we have a Savior/King who has chosen to connect himself to sinners like us, to be compassionately gracious, and to convey his great power to us and for us every day. And that's "wow" enough! Amen