

If I were to say to you, "The end is near," what would you think about? Or if I used words like "apocalypse" or "doomsday" or even "Armageddon," what would come to mind? If I had to guess, I would probably think it would be something negative, something bad. Because in our culture today, we very often use those words and those phrases to talk about something bad. Just think of how many movies you can think of, for example, that use words like "apocalypse" or "doomsday" to talk about some disaster that is about to hit the world. The reason why I think that happens, to be honest, is because whenever the Bible talks about what is to come, talks about the future, it talks about hard times for God's people. And we get so focused in on those that we think that that's what the whole end is going to be like, that it's all going to be bad, that it's all going to be a disaster. But Christians, the end is not a disaster. The hard times which are to come, come before the end. But the end itself is victory: the victory of God, the victory of Christ, the victory of his Church. It is a victory and a kingdom which will never come to an end.

That's the message which we hear today from our Old Testament reading in Daniel chapter 7. Daniel points us to the coming of the Son of Man and the kingdom which will be his forever. But Daniel also points us to what's going to come before that point, to the hard times which are to come. And so that's why he begins with those in our chapter, beginning at verse 2.

Daniel says this: "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea." So Daniel sees a vision, then, of turmoil, of chaos, of winds stirring up water so that it's bubbling and frothing all over. But this imagery that he uses is symbolic. It stands for something else. The sea represents the peoples, the nations of the world. We know that because of Psalm 65, which says that the Lord is the one who "stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples." So you can hear there: seas, waves, and peoples are all used together. The vision which Daniel sees is the peoples of the world, the nations of the world stirred up in opposition to the Lord, stirred up in opposition to his Church.

But the vision goes on, verse 3: "And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another." These beasts, as we learn in verse 17, represent four kingdoms. Kingdoms which are opposed to God, kingdoms which fight against his Church. They're described as beasts, animal-like in their opposition to the Lord.

And so we meet the first beast, then. Verse 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." So the first beast which he sees is strong like a lion. It is swift and fast like an eagle. Describing a great empire which would conquer many things. This first beast, Christians, represents Babylon. And Babylon certainly caused all kinds of problems for God's people. Because it was Babylon that destroyed Jerusalem. It was Babylon that carried Israel away into exile, causing all kinds of hard times for the people of God. But Babylon was brought down. It was humbled before God, just as Nebuchadnezzar, its greatest king, was made to kneel before the Lord. So its wings were plucked off and its power was lost.

But then we meet the second beast, verse 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.'" So this second beast too is also strong, strong like a bear. But it's a

lopsided bear, because its legs on one side are longer than the other. And the reason for that is because it's actually two kingdoms merged into one, what we know as the Medes and the Persians. And the Persians were the stronger of the two. And this empire, the Medes and the Persians, conquered a great amount of land, a greater empire even than Nebuchadnezzar had done. But they also caused problems for God's people, as we learn in the book of Esther. There were some among them who wanted to destroy Israel, to wipe them out entirely. So in those days, they were also difficult for the people of God.

The third beast we meet in verse 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." So this third beast, then, is very, very fast. It's described as being like a leopard. You could even translated as, "like a cheetah." Like a big cat with wings, something which is exceedingly swift. And not just two wings, but four, so that it is faster still! It would carry out its conquest very, very quickly. And this beast represents Alexander the Great, who conquered a very large empire, even bigger than the Medes and the Persians, in the space of just a few years. And the reason why this beast has four heads is because when Alexander died, it divided into four kingdoms. And one of those kingdoms in particular persecuted the people of God. They tried to make them pagans. They defiled the temple. They did everything they could to make them fall. It was a very difficult time, indeed, for the people of God.

But we meet the fourth and last beast in verse 7, where it says: "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." So this fourth beast is different from everything that has come before it. It's almost unnatural, because it has iron teeth. And we learn in verse 23 that it would devour the entire earth, that it would come to rule over all the known world. That means that this fourth beast, Christians, was the Roman Empire, the greatest empire of history, the one that conquered all of the known world of the day. And the Roman Empire persecuted God's people in the early years of the church, so that it killed many and made many martyrs. It was a time of great tribulation for the people of God.

But this beast is said to have ten horns, and as we learn in verse 24: "As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise." So in other words, these horns represent kingdoms that would come after the Roman Empire, that would continue on its legacy, that would continue to persecute the people of God.

Christians, we live in the time of the ten horns. We live in a time when worldly kingdoms are opposed to God, which fight against God and his Church. Just look around you in the world today. We can see it happening right before our very eyes. We have governments which try to make us sin, which pressure us into doing things that God has told us not to do. We have authorities who are demanding our allegiance, who want us to follow after them first, and then maybe we can follow after God. These authorities want to be treated as gods. Because think about some of the things that they say. "We're going take care of you, give you everything that you need. We will save you from all of your troubles. And you have to submit to us. There's no way you can fight against us. There's nothing you can do to oppose us. We are the ones who decide what marriage means. We are the ones who decide what it means to be male and female."

And on and on their claims go. So Christians, certainly they are acting as if they were gods. This is nothing new, of course. In the days of the Roman Empire, the Roman emperors were actually worshiped as gods, treated as literal deities. But in this way, they set themselves up against the Lord, set themselves up and speak against him in all of these things, which leaves us with some very difficult times indeed. How are we supposed to oppose that? What are we supposed to do?

But Daniel tells us that there is one yet to come. Verse 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." So this one will be the worst of all of them, the one who will claim great things, who will speak against the Lord. And as we learn in verse 25, "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." He will claim to be God. Paul calls him the "man of lawlessness" in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2, one who will oppose God with all that he has. And one who will succeed for a short time. In his days, Christians, things will seem to be their very worst. It will seem like evil will finally win the day.

But it won't. Evil will not win. Evil will fall. The things which we see around us will come to an end. The kingdoms of the world which fight against God will crumble into nothing. Their power will be taken away, and their proud and haughty voices will be silenced forever. Because on the last day, Christians, when the end comes, God will come with his ten thousands. On the last day, when the end comes, God will sit in judgment over all the nations of the earth. On the last day, when the end comes, the beast will be destroyed. And all of those who persecute the saints of God will be thrown into hell, never to rise again. What a glorious day that's going to be, Christians, when our Lord brings the victory forever!

Because there is another King, Christians. There is another Kingdom. Not a kingdom from the earth, but a kingdom which comes down from above. The Son of Man has been lifted up by the Ancient of Days, and given power and authority forever. As we hear in verse 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." Christians, this is Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the Father. And he shall reign forever and ever as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. All things are going to be put under his feet, that is, he's going to conquer everything. And not just in some vague, spiritual sense, but in a real sense. Because every kingdom, every government, every authority, every king, every emperor, every president, every people, every nation, every language, every man, every woman, and every child who has ever lived or ever shall live will bow before him. Because he is the King, Christians, not just of the Church, but of all mankind. He is the one to whom all will bend the knee, either to their everlasting shame or to their everlasting glory. What a glorious day that will be, Christians, when Jesus is all in all!

And this kingdom has already begun! We're not just waiting for it to happen. It's already here. Because Jesus tells us in Matthew chapter 28 that "all authority on earth and in heaven has been given to me." The dominion belongs to him, and the church grows and will continue to grow. And nothing in earth or in heaven will be able to stop it, because his is the victory forever. And

on the last day, this kingdom will be complete. There will be no more opposition, no more evil that will be able to fight against it. The victory of Christ will be forever, and he shall reign as king forever and ever. Amen!

So Christians, stand firm. Don't give in to the pressures of the world. There is only one King before whom you should kneel, one Authority before whom you should bow, and that is Jesus Christ. So that no matter what happens to us in the days ahead, Christians, the victory belongs to him forever. So the end is near, yes. The end of evil, the end of suffering. Doomsday is coming, yes. The doom of all of those who oppose God. And the apocalypse will soon be upon us, and then Jesus Christ will be revealed in all his glory. What a day that will be, Christians, when Jesus returns! So, stand firm, because Jesus is King forever!

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, to you belongs all power and authority and victory. Help us always to stand firm while we wait for you to return, knowing that you will have the victory over all things forever. For you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.