

SEQUOYAH HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Daniel: Becoming Unstoppable”

Rev. Ben Garris

Daniel 2:27-45

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Good morning, my name is Ben Garris, and I am still new here at Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church. I'm grateful that Jay and Mark entrusted me with the privilege of wrapping up the Gospel of Luke series last Sunday on Pentecost, and now I get the honor of kicking off a new series in the book of Daniel on this Trinity Sunday. Let me preface the message this morning with the reality that we are celebrating communion today and thus I have the double task of orienting you to the entire book of Daniel while also sharing a specific message from our texts today. I say that because for this sermon we're going to take off and run at a faster pace right away, so let's get to it.

Some history: in 587-586 B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem and took many treasured items and many people back to Babylon to live and serve him there. You can read more about the besieging in 2 Kings 24-25. Among those who were in exile were young men of both good fighting age and aptitude, but for the sake of this book, we are told in Chapter 1 that Nebuchadnezzar was also interested in Israelites from the royal family and those of nobility who were competent to serve in the king's palace. Thus, we are introduced to Daniel and his 3 friends: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. All of these specific Israelites were to be indoctrinated in Babylonian culture and language for 3 years so that they could serve in the king's court, which also included their Israelite names changing to Babylonian names: Beltashaz, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So that's a wave tops history lesson.

Daniel is what we call apocalyptic literature. Does everyone know what apocalyptic means? The world is going to end, right? WRONG. It comes from a Greek word meaning: to reveal or unveil. Any time we read apocalyptic literature we are encountering something that God is revealing to us, **so that we can better understand the heavenly perspective of what is actually happening here on earth today.** Apocalyptic literature is often filled with poetry and great amounts of symbolism and the authors assume that you know your Bible well enough that you will pick up on themes and patterns recurring throughout the Bible as you read.

So, pop quiz, who is King of Babylon? (Nebuchadnezzar) When did he besiege Jerusalem? (587-586 B.C.) Who are the 4 Israelite youth highlighted in this book? (Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah) And what does “apocalypse” mean? (Unveiling/revealing). GREAT! We now pick up in chapter 2, where King Nebuchadnezzar has had a dream that he doesn't understand, and he

has given a harsh decree to have all the “wise men” of Babylon destroyed because none of them can interpret his dream... that is, until God gives Daniel an apocalypse by revealing the mystery and meaning of the dream.

²⁷ Daniel answered the king, ‘No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or diviners can show to the king the mystery that the king is asking, ²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has disclosed to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen at the end of days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed were these: ²⁹ To you, O king, as you lay in bed, came thoughts of what would be hereafter, and the revealer of mysteries disclosed to you what is to be. ³⁰ But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me because of any wisdom that I have more than any other living being, but in order that the interpretation may be known to the king and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind.

³¹ ‘You were looking, O king, and lo! there was a great statue. This statue was huge, its brilliance extraordinary; it was standing before you, and its appearance was frightening. ³² The head of that statue 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 on, a stone was cut out, not by human hands, and it struck the statue 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, were all 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 statue 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, the might, and the glory, ³⁸ into whose hand he has given human beings, wherever they live, the wild animals of the field, and the birds of the air, and whom he has established as ruler over them all—you are the head of gold. ³⁹ After you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over the whole earth. ⁴⁰ And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron; just as iron crushes and smashes everything, it shall crush and shatter all these. ⁴¹ 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 strength of iron shall be in it, as you saw the iron mixed with the clay. ⁴² As the toes of the feet were part iron and part clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. ⁴³ As you saw the iron mixed with clay, so will they 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 this kingdom be left to another people. It shall crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever; ⁴⁵ just as you saw that a stone was cut from the mountain not by hands, and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. The great God has informed the king what shall be hereafter. The dream is certain, and its interpretation trustworthy.’ Daniel 2:27-45

I wonder what it would be like to be an Israelite in Babylon. I wonder what that must have felt like to have your entire homeplace laid to ruin and rubble and set ablaze. I wonder what that was like to be led away from your safe home where you grew up, where you enjoyed your mother’s cooking, games with your friends, where your language was understood, and where you had plans for your life. I wonder what that’s like to survive the onslaught of an attacking nation only

to be led away with the rubbing of iron against your skin and the chink of the chains dangling as you and your countrymen are taken away. I imagine I would've felt defeated. I imagine morale would've been zero. I imagine I would be worried and downright afraid as to what would happen to me. I imagine Babylon would feel larger than life, an enemy too great to topple. I imagine that as my world goes up in smoke and ash behind me that this King of Babylon would appear completely unstoppable. In truth and in gratitude, we can only imagine what that must be like, but I wonder if you have ever had a time in your life when you felt up against something completely defeating and unstoppable? If you live long enough, you probably will. How did Daniel maintain his hope even while enslaved under an unstoppable king like Nebuchadnezzar? How do we hold fast to hope when we face something unstoppable in our own lives?

Daniel and his friends have somehow maintained their convictions, they've maintained their identity even with their new names, and they have maintained hope while now serving in a foreign king's court. The very king that just destroyed their world. To complicate matters even more this same king is angry and seeking to destroy all the "wise men" of Babylon which now includes Daniel and his friends if no one can interpret this dream for the king. It seems odd to us and our own social location, but in Biblical times kings believed themselves to be gods, and dreams had the power to tell you your future and wouldn't we all like to know our future is going to be a good one!? Thus, by God's mercy, God reveals to Daniel the interpretation of the dream correctly for the king. A dream about a huge, brilliant statue and a rock that smashes the statue into dust which is blown away with the wind. A dream about a rock that becomes a mountain symbolic for a kingdom that becomes unstoppable. This morning I want to focus on these two verses:

(37-38) "You, O king, the king of kings—to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the might, and the glory, into whose hand he has given human beings, wherever they live, the wild animals of the field, and the birds of the air, and whom he has established as ruler over them all."

How can Daniel maintain his conviction and identity? How can these 4 young Israelites have hope in a foreign land working for a foreign king of violence and oppression? By never forgetting that God is the unstoppable force, not Babylon, and certainly not Nebuchadnezzar. A lesson so simple, its theory is easy enough for us to comprehend, but which might be the absolute hardest task when put into practice. When your faith and trust are in an unstoppable God, your faith and convictions become unstoppable no matter the circumstances you find yourself in. Daniel can approach the king about his dream because God has put him there for that very purpose. Daniel recognizes that Nebuchadnezzar only has the kingdom, the power, the might, and the glory because God has given it to him. Likewise, Jesus, who knew the book of Daniel and applied its imagery to the leaders of Rome during his time, could stand there before Pilate

who said, *“Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?”* And with unstoppable trust in his unstoppable Father Jesus replied, *“You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”* If you want to become unstoppable, be obedient to the unstoppable God of heaven.

So, let’s quickly talk about you. What has been that seemingly unstoppable thing or person or circumstance in your life? What is it that has been keeping you up at night, robbing you of your peace, eating away at your world and boasting about its power over you? **Students**, is it a looming future so unknown and daunting yet still marching toward you completely unstoppable that you stress in every class, you stress at home, and even amongst your friends your fun time is besieged by stress? The great God of heaven is the unstoppable one. Model yourselves after Daniel’s obedience unto God and become fortified in your resolve. **Young adults**, does professional life seem like an unstoppable force? Bills, bills, bills, and a housing market that also seems to be unstoppable; sucking up half of your take-home pay just to rent an apartment. God is the unstoppable one! He will see you through and He will provide. **Parents**, does the world itself seem like this huge, nasty, unstoppable monster just out to gobble your children up, so much so that you’re immobilized by fear for them and wondering if you’re making the right decision even though children don’t come with a “how to” manual? God is unstoppable, and the very first words He uses to describe himself in the Bible in Exodus 34:6, is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in faithful love and truth. Will you place your children in the hands of an unstoppable compassionate God? Has your anxiety, worry or depression met your unstoppable God yet? When two seemingly unstoppable forces meet you will discover which one truly is unstoppable, so allow the Rock of your salvation to smash your fears and worries into dust and be replaced with a trust so great it can face fiery furnaces and lions dens.

We cannot know what it was like for the Israelites taken over by Babylon, or to be the Jews defeated by Rome, or for the Ukrainians being attacked by Russia today, but we can know what it is like to place our hope and identity in an unstoppable God. May we be inspired by Daniel who, because of his faithfulness and convictions, could face a seemingly unstoppable king. As we prepare to partake in Holy Communion with Jesus may we stand firm like Jesus who, knowing that death on a cross lay before him, nonetheless submitted his will to the Father’s because it was revealed to Jesus how a seemingly unstoppable force called death would itself be destroyed by the great God of heaven, for death cannot exist in God’s kingdom. May we, the church of Jesus Christ, be empowered by his unstoppable Spirit to demolish kingdoms of violence and oppression and replace them with the unstoppable kingdom of God that will never fade or perish. For thine alone O’ Triune God is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.