

The Right Side of Everything

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[0 : 00] This image mighty and of exceeding brightness stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of the image was fine gold, its chest and arms silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

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. 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. This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation.

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, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the fields, and the birds of the heavens, making you ruler over them all.

You are the head of gold. Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom, a bronze, which shall rule over the earth, and there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things.

[1 : 23] And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all things. 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. And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle.

And as you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they shall not hold together, just as the iron does not mix with clay. 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. Just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hands, that it broke in pieces iron, the bronze and the clay, and 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. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word, which instructs us, which enlightens us, which tells us what is true.

[2 : 39] So, Lord, even as we've read your word this morning, we pray, O Holy Spirit, that you will open our hearts to receive it. Your word is clear, but oftentimes we have difficulty because our minds are clouded by so many things.

So, Lord, open our heart, open our ears, open our minds to receive truth from you. Help me, as I explain this passage, to explain it truly, to explain it according to what you are saying, and may I do so in a way that is clear and helpful for all of us.

We pray this all in Jesus' name. Amen. When I was a freshman in college, I was at Georgia Tech, and the school would host a variety of engineering contests, and the biggest contest of the year, every year, was the Great Race.

And it was a time when the engineers would build these coasters that they would design to go down the hill at the center of the campus, and whoever could design the fastest coaster would win. And so, you know, I didn't have time for such frivolous activities because I was engaged in other frivolous activities.

But I had friends who were doing this, and they were building this coaster, and they were using all their engineering, things that they learned, working out the design so that it would be the most

aerodynamic, figuring out the right circumference of the wheels, even the right width of the tires, so that it could go the fastest.

[4 : 03] Well, once they got it all completed, another friend and I thought, hey, it'd be fun to take it for a test drive. So late one night, we got the coaster, and we went to the center of the Tech campus, and we started going down the hill, and it was fast.

It was a very fast coaster. The problem was that on the day of the race, all the roads would be closed. This was not the day of the race. And we were headed towards this major intersection, that was run through campus, and it was dark.

It was late at night, and there was no way that the cars were going to be able to see us, and we realized we're out of control. Well, my friend is the driver. I'm the brake man. He's yelling at me, slow us down, slow us down. And I panicked.

I pulled back the brake lever so hard, it broke off. And we're not slowing down, and my friend doesn't know what's going on. He's going, slow down, slow down. And I'm looking. I go, what do I do?

And so he realizes something's wrong, so he decides to turn sharply to get it to slow down. The coaster was straight. It was not made to go fast turning.

[5 : 06] And when he did that, it just began to roll over and over. And I'm on one side of the street, bloodied and battered up, and he's on the other side of the street, all bloodied and battered up.

And between us are parts. You know, wheel here, wheel there, seat there. It is a total... We're going to do everything that we can, and we carry it back to the house, arguing about what we've got to do over this crash.

And we walk into the house where these men had given up nights and we're going to do everything. They're not worried that I'm bloodied and battered.

They don't care. All they see is all of their work they have wasted. I mean, they've given up sleep. They've given up weekends. They've given up all this, and now it is all ruined in just a moment.

And there's a terrible feeling for them and terrible... It came to nothing. And that's depressing, isn't it? Isn't it depressing when you work really hard on something and you...

[6 : 15] But how do you know that's not the story of your life? We see here in Daniel chapter 2 that King Nebuchadnezzar, who was a glorious king in many ways, had a success in this life than any of us could ever hope to possibly attain.

And he has this nightmare, reoccurring dream that is so disturbing he cannot sleep anymore. And he begins to realize intuitively something is wrong here.

Everything is coming to naught. And so this dream that it's all that would be wiped out, yet as depressing as that sounds, the same dream that Nebuchadnezzar has about everything being lost also gives us...

What is our hope? What is our comfort? We read about it moments ago. What is our hope? What is our comfort? How can we have hope in a world that it seems like everything is being blown away? Well, so to understand how we can have a life of meaning and purpose that will last forever, we need to understand three things from this text. The first thing that we need to understand is, number one, that God is in control.

[7 : 31] God is in control. And we see this in this passage. Now, Nebuchadnezzar, again, one of the great, greatest empires of all time, the Babylonian, he had conquered Judah, Phoenicia, and what is today Syria.

After conquering all these lands, he was going to build a peaceful kingdom. He was a very skilled and gifted ruler and administrator. And so he was able to bring peace to that region.

And then he wanted to make something beautiful. So he began these massive things that were glorious. One of the things that he built, I've heard of, it was one of the seven of the world, the hanging gardens of Babylon.

So here's a man who's built these beautiful kingdoms, laboring to establish this glory so that his name would live forever. He has this disturbing dream that he cannot sleep.

So he calls together his wise men, the enchanters, the stargazers, the savvies, promises them that he will make them imaginations.

[8 : 40] Well, King, tell us the dream. And he says, not so fast. I want you to tell me both the dream and the interpretation. They said, no, tell us the dream and then we can tell you what it means.

He goes, no, I think you're playing games with me here. If you really know, if you really know what the gods are saying, you can tell me both the dream and its interpretation. And they say, we can't do that.

No one can do that. Only the gods know. They don't dwell with flesh. So Nebuchadnezzar realizes they're all just a bunch of charlatans. They act like they know what the gods are saying.

They act like they're able to read the stars and talk to the dead, but it's all an act. They don't really know anything. Only the gods know, and they don't know what the gods know, and so they've been exposed as frauds.

They claim to know the future, but God is the only one who knows where the future is headed.

Today, people will speak about some behaviors being on the right side of history, some behaviors on the wrong side of history, and it assumes a particular version of the future.

[9 : 46] And it also assumes that they have the vantage point of the future and can look back at us and see how history is going to judge this particular moment. They understand. In other words, they're claiming to know where history is going.

And here's the question that Nebuchadnezzar would ask them that we ought to ask them is, how do you know? How do you know how the future is going to judge the past? How do you know if history is going anywhere?

Now, how do you know? You're speaking with certainty about what the future is going to say about the present, about the direction of history, but how do you know? As Nebuchadnezzar forces his counselors to admit, God only knows what's going to happen.

He is the only one who can say what will and will not happen. Now, for the counselors, this is a point of despair because they're saying, well, God only knows. We don't know. And so there's no hope.

How can we understand? For God's people, this is encouraging news. This is good news for us. While we don't know the future, God knows the future.

[10 : 52] He alone knows what stands on the right side of history. And God knows. And so we see that as God knows the future, not because God is sitting here looking down the corridors of time and can see what is happening.

God knows the future because God is the author of the future. God determines the future. He is in control of the future. Now, there's one thing that we have learned in this past year, and hopefully there are many.

But one thing we've learned is we are not in control. You are not in control. I mean, how many of us had plans last year totally blown out of the water by the pandemic?

We are not in control. And not only are we not in control, we really don't know what tomorrow holds. We don't know. We did not see the pandemic coming. We don't know when the next pandemic is going to come.

You don't know if the stock market is going to go up or if it's going to come crashing down. You don't know what the driver in the next lane is going to do. You are not in control of that, right?

[11 : 54] And yet all of these things will affect your life in dramatic ways. And you're in control of none of that. Now, while that's terrifying, particularly for me, I'm a person who likes to be in control.

I want to be in control of these things. And it's terrifying to think I have absolutely no control. If your person who thinks you're in control have children, it will just blow your whole image of control the right way.

We're not in control. Yet, just because we are not in control, what will happen is we'll move to despair and say then everything is out of control. Because I don't know the future, that means no one knows the future.

That's not true. Nebuchadnezzar's own counselors say, they say the gods, but we know there's just one. God knows the future. God is in control of the future.

And the God who is in control of the future is the same God who rules over all things and who deeply loves and cares for his people.

[12 : 56] God is in control. And for those who trust in Jesus, this gives us hope because the God who controls all things loves us so much that he gave his son to die for us.

Here's why we have such great courage. The idea that God is in control by itself is not comforting. But if I believe that God is my father, it changes everything. I remember, you know, years ago, I was driving down the road one evening.

We lived in Florida at the time. And in Florida, we get rain. Colorado, we get a sprinkle. We get rain. And it was one night, it was coming down in buckets. There's enough rain to fill Prospect Lake in a few minutes.

And it is just pouring down. And it's dark. And the wipers are quite clearing. And I've got a death grip on the steering wheel. And Tricia turns to me and goes, you okay?

And of course I lie. You know. Yeah. In control. You know. I've got this. But the white knuckles of my hand are a dead giveaway that I am terrified at this moment.

[13:57] And I look into the rear view mirror to see our girls in the back seat. And I'm thinking, maybe they're, they've got to be scared. They're all asleep. They are out.

Why? Because, because dad is behind the wheel. And my children had this irrational confidence. confidence. That if I was behind the wheel, they would be okay.

You know, your three-year-old just does not worry about paying the bills. They're not worried about what's going to happen with the economy. They're not worried about home repairs. They don't worry about those things. They have a father who worries about those things.

Now, my children, if they could have that sort of confidence in me, when I am prone to error, when I make mistakes, when I'm very, very fallible, how much more should we, as the people of God, be able to rest knowing that our father's hands are firmly on the wheel?

He is in control. You have nothing to worry about. Now, he doesn't always tell you what he's doing or why he's doing what he's doing. You don't need to know. He's got this. He's got this. He is in control.

[15:08] And not only is he in control, but he is for you, Christian. You know he's for you. We know he's for you because as our father, he is the one who gave Christ for us.

That's why we celebrate the cross. The cross, which was a symbol of torture and death in the first century, is a symbol of love for us. And by giving his life on the cross for us, Jesus proves that he's committed to our good even to the point of death.

And we celebrate the cross, but we celebrate an empty cross because Jesus has finished the work for our salvation and God, the Father, has raised him from the dead, proving that he has the power to save us even from the most fearful of enemies, death itself.

Because God is all-powerful and he uses his power to care for his children. Everything he does, everything he does ultimately is for his glory and our good and he is in control of all things and we can trust him in the midst of that.

Well, once the wise men of Babylon admit they really don't know anything, that they're not so wise after all, Nebuchadnezzar is so enraged because he realizes they've been playing games with him all along, he decides he's just going to kill them all.

[16:26] All the wise men throughout the entire empire, all the counselors throughout the entire empire. Well, Daniel hears about this and Daniel and his friends are part of this wise men class.

They're not like the others but they're part of that class of people. So Daniel is slated to be executed. So he sends words to the king and he says, come and may I speak with you.

Now Daniel at this point does not know the dream, he does not know the interpretation. So he asks for an appointment with the king and then he goes to his friends and says, pray that God will tell me what to say because your life depends on it.

So Daniel goes into the king and speaks to him in the passage we just read and here we see the second key to living a life that is full of meaning and purpose and that is recognizing that the kingdoms of this world will all pass away.

The kingdoms of this world are all going to pass away. Now in this dream, Nebuchadnezzar sees this enormous statue, head of gold, it's dazzling in appearance, pure gold, its chest and arms are of silver, its belly of bronze, its legs of iron and feet of iron mixed with clay and Daniel explains that each of those sections of the statue represent a different world empire and he starts off with some great news.

[17:46] He says to Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar, your empire is amazing. You are the head of gold, glorious beyond all glory. But Nebuchadnezzar, I've got some bad news.

Your empire is not going to last forever. Another empire will come and it is one of silver. Now the text does not directly explain to us what that empire will be but it seems to indicate the next empire to come was the empire of the Medes and the Persians who conquered the Babylonians.

And it was a great empire but it wasn't as glorious as Nebuchadnezzar's. And then the next empire was one of bronze and again the text doesn't tell us but we know that later on another empire would come and it was that of the Greeks.

Alexander the Great would conquer the world and then after that would come another empire, one of iron. And this seemed to be a reference to the Roman Empire, one that is mighty and one that is strong but did not have quite the beauty of the others.

Now in Nebuchadnezzar's vision, a rock strikes this statue, a rock that is not carved out by human hands and colorizes it and the statue becomes like dust and then the wind comes and sweeps it away so that there's nothing left.

[19 : 01] There's nothing remains. And the point of this is that is what happens to all the empires of this world. All of them.

All of them. Babylonian, Medes and the Persians, Greeks, Romans, you can take that on, British Empire, American Empire, whatever it may be.

All of the empires of this world are passing away and nothing will be left. And so the point of this is that none of these things will last, the kingdoms of this world.

And so what's the point? What kingdom are you living for? What kingdom are you living for? All of our lives we've been told that fulfillment is found in success, achievement, finding a way to establish your identity, find a way to establish your worth.

You know, the ancient Greeks thought that they could establish their glory if they were heroic deeds in battle or athletic accomplishments that they could establish their name forever.

[20 : 04] It was a way to find salvation. And many of us are looking to the same thing. And yet what we see here in Daniel's vision is that these things that we're seeking our glory to find our meaning and finding our purpose ultimately become dust in the wind, become nothing more.

And so all of our lives were told that, that defined a sense of identity in these things, but Nebuchadnezzar's vision shows us that it's all a lie. If you are a football fan, you may have heard the name Urban Meyer.

Urban Meyer is only one of three coaches ever to win national championships with two different college teams. And Urban Meyer, when he was coaching at the University of Florida, he had a quarterback, and if you're from Colorado, you may have heard of a guy named Tim Tebow.

Tebow was his quarterback, and they won a national championship. The night they won the national championship, they're celebrating. Immediately that very evening while everyone is celebrating, Urban Meyer begins recruiting players for the next year.

He says he just couldn't stop. A friend came up to him and said, what are you doing? Enjoy this. What's wrong with you? And Urban Meyer says at that time, he goes, we just won, but I was in a panic.

[21 : 16] Because what happens? He just won glory, the top prize that he could possibly win, and he knew it would not last that he had to do it again and again and again. And it was driving him crazy.

He couldn't even enjoy the moment. We think if we had fame and fortune or power that we could be somebody. But Nebuchadnezzar had more fame, more power, more glory than any of us could ever achieve.

And yet, realized that it all was dust in the wind. Philip Yancey talks about a carving in Waterford, Ireland. And it's a carving of the mayor, but you would think that a carving of an old mayor would be one of a beautiful tribute.

But this carving was at the time of the Black Death. And it shows the body of the former mayor's town decomposing while rats and vermin and insects are eating it.

Beautiful carving, right? The inscription says this, Whoever you are that passed by, stand, read, weep.

[22 : 22] I am what you will be and I was what you are. Dust in the wind. Dust in the wind. The kingdoms of this world are fleeting and passing.

And if you put your hope in them, you're putting your hope in something that will not last. That's the bad news. That's the bad news. But Nebuchadnezzar's vision, though, ultimately is not pessimistic, or at least it doesn't have to be.

It brings us to the third key to living a life with meaning and purpose, a life that lasts forever, and that is this, that we are to live for the kingdom that endures. Live for the kingdom that endures.

Now, after the rock comes and obliterates this statue, the rock, as it were, then begins to grow and expand, and it ends up filling the whole earth, and Daniel tells us that this rock becomes a mountain that fills the earth, and it represents the kingdom of God.

Now, this image of a mountain representing the kingdom of God is not unique to Daniel. We see it in other prophecies. We see it in Isaiah chapter 2 and Micah chapter 4. And the idea here is that it is a mountain that is a place of worship.

[23 : 33] See, in the ancient world, they thought of the sky as being a place where earth and heaven would come into contact. That's why they build these high pyramids and ziggurats and different things because they thought if you could get to the high spot, you would be where the heavens and earth come in contact, and so they build their altars and they build even their temples on high places.

And we see that throughout the Old Testament. And so, the mountain is a place of worship. And what this image is telling us is that the mountain of the Lord is going to fill the earth.

That the whole earth is going to worship the Lord. That the kingdom of God is going to fill the entire world and that the people of the entire world will one day be coming and worshipping the Lord.

And Daniel tells us not only that this kingdom of God is coming and that it will endure forever, it will be the kingdom that lasts. He even tells us when this kingdom will come. When's this kingdom going to come?

When's God going to bring about the kingdom? Well, he tells us it's going to happen during that fourth kingdom, the kingdom of iron, but with feet of clay mixed with iron. So when the Roman Empire came along, what it lacked in beauty and grace and more than made up for strength and power, power unlike the world had ever seen, it seems only appropriate that iron would represent this kingdom.

[24 : 57] But at the height of the Roman Empire, at its pinnacle, something happened that was so dramatic that it changed the history of the world forever. And yet, it went unnoticed at the moment because in a little village, obscure village, in the outskirts of the empire, just outside of Jerusalem, in this little village known as Bethlehem, a baby was born.

Hardly anyone noticed, no one paid attention. That baby grew up at age 33. He was taken outside the city gates there in Jerusalem. And outside the city gates, he was executed.

Do you remember the charges against him? Do you remember why he was put to death? The plaque said in three different languages, the king of the Jews. Jesus Christ had come to bring the kingdom of heaven.

In fact, Jesus made this clear. He announced his kingdom of heaven by announcing, as he proclaimed the gospel around, that he is the rock. And he said this. He says, he says, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.

The kingdom of heaven is at hand. What Jesus is saying is I am the king and I'm the one who's come to bring the kingdom. So we now know something that Nebuchadnezzar could not know. We know what the rock is or should we say who the rock is.

[26 : 17] Jesus is the rock. And he's come to bring the kingdom. He's the rock that's not cut from the mountain by any human hands, that breaks into his history, bringing judgment on all that stands in his path and all who try to hinder it.

The kingdom of God is here. When Jesus came and announced the kingdom of God, then we see the mountain growing, right? That's the picture we see in Nebuchadnezzar's vision. It fills the whole earth.

And that's what we're seeing today. What started off as a small band of worshipers in the Middle East has grown into a mountain that fills the entire earth. Think about this. Now, in Acts chapter 2, we're told there are 120 people there gathering in Jerusalem.

This isn't even an important place in the world at the time. 120 people. Yet today, today, there are Christians on every continent and just about every country around the world.

Estimates are there's nearly as many practicing Christians in China today as there are in the United States. It's amazing. There are more people in church today in Kenya than there are in Canada.

[27 : 27] There are more Presbyterians in church today in Ghana than there are in Scotland, which is astounding. And not only that, and I think of a century ago. A century ago, there were hardly any Christians in Korea.

And yet today, South Korea has over 16,000 cross-cultural missionaries. They are sending out missionaries to 173 different countries. Christian leaders in China are planning to send out 20,000 missionaries by the year 2030.

Nebuchadnezzar's vision is coming true right before our eyes. The kingdom of God is growing and is filling the earth. Yet there are still over 3 billion people who live in places where there are no viable Christian witnesses.

Places where people die every day without hearing about the love of God. In other places, the gospel is being preached, but the gospel that's being preached is hardly recognizable by scripture. It is a gospel of works, of legalism. Other places, it's a prosperity gospel, which simply leads people into greater bondage rather than the freedom that Jesus Christ came to give.

[28 : 33] And as a result, people are trading one form of bondage for another. The kingdom of God is growing, but the work is not yet finished. And that's why at Shine Mountain you have been so engaged.

You have people who are part of your church in a country that we can't mention. We'll just call it the kingdom. And where they are announcing the good news of the gospel. The Shemkees, whom you support, are in Africa with African Bible University training people to preach the true gospel rather than an adulterated version so that the gospel can go forth.

But we need more. You're part of the Presbyterian Church in America. And one of the things we're praying for is a church that 1% of our members over the next 10 years will commit to serving in cross-cultural missions.

A mission to the world where I serve, we have actually very specific needs, places where we need people right now. Because over the next 10 years, our goal is to plant 486 new churches. churches. We want to do this in 192 new cities, 63 new countries. How in the world are we going to do this? Well, we need 1,000 more missionaries.

[29 : 41] And that's why I'm here speaking to you today. 1,000 more missionaries. We need 800 more interns to go. And then beyond that, somebody's got to support these missionaries and these interns too, right?

I mean, it costs money to take the gospel to the nations. So the vision of Daniel chapter 2 is happening right now before our eyes.

And our calling as the people of God is to be part of what he is doing. See, as children, we're not just passive spectators watching God work. The way God works and announcing his kingdom and bringing his kingdom is through his church, is through his people.

That's why Jesus commissioned his church. He said, go into all the world and preach the gospel, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. It is how the vision of Daniel 2 takes place.

The vision of Daniel 2 will come about fully and completely. But God's using his people to do it. And those who are part of God's family join in the family business.

[30 : 44] And if you want to be on the right side of history, here's where history is going. The kingdom of God is filling the earth. That's why we engage in the work that God is doing around the world. And so that raises an important question.

In fact, we call it the most important question. Which kingdom are you living for? Are you living for a kingdom that is going to fade? Or are you living for a kingdom that is eternal?

Are you looking to find your glory in that which is passing, that will one day be reduced to dust and then swept away by the breeze? Or are you looking for your glory in the kingdom of heaven?

Josh McDowell tells a story of an old man who came up to him one time after he gave a message. And by his dress and demeanor, it was pretty obvious that this older gentleman was very successful.

And the older man said, my whole life, I've been climbing the ladder trying to get to the top. I've stepped on people along the way and made numerous sacrifices. Now I'm an old man and I realize for all these years, I've had my ladder leaning against the wrong building.

[31 : 56] What are you living for? What kingdom are you living for? The reason Jesus came and lived and died was not so he could create a ladder by which we could climb to him.

And instead, he's the one who descended Jacob's ladder to come to us. He is the one who came to make a way for us to be a part of his kingdom, to be a part of what he's doing here and throughout the world.

And he invites us to follow him in faith, to trust in him, to trust that by his life, his death, his perfect obedience, by sacrificial death, vindicated through the resurrection, where he now is ascended and reigning in heaven, he's proven to us that there's one kingdom that will last.

And if we are united to him, we are part of that kingdom and we will last forever. Where's your hope? My only hope in life and death. It's found in him.

Let's pray. Our Father, we do thank you for the hope that we have through Jesus Christ that he is the rock and he has come to bring his kingdom.

[33 : 02] And Lord, we thank you that we live in a time in history in which we're seeing the fulfillment of this promise in such remarkable, beautiful, glorious ways. And so, oh Lord, we pray.

We pray, oh Lord, that we would set our sights on earth instead of seeking to find our life in things that are temporary that we would seek to find our hope and our joy in things that are eternal.

We thank you that Jesus has done everything necessary for us to share in that kingdom and that it is ours through faith and faith alone. So Lord, today as your people, we affirm that faith.

We believe that Jesus is Lord. We believe that he is king and we trust him as our king, as our Lord. And we want to follow you. And so Lord, we commit this day to living for the one eternal kingdom.

We commit to that with everything that we do and how we raise our children, how we engage in our families, how we spend our money, how we do our jobs. Lord, may we do it all for your glory, for your good, for your praise.

[34 : 04] And Lord, we pray too that you would give us a heart for the world, a heart to see this kingdom fill the entire globe. See people from every tribe and tongue, every ethnic group, people in every place come and worship and praise you, O Lord.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.