

## **Pako Morning Service 25/11/2016**

Readings: Luke 20:9-18; Daniel 2:24-49; Message “Kingdom’s come kingdoms go – except one”

Congregation, I still remember when I was a young man that our congregational prayers often included praying that the Iron and Bamboo curtains would be brought down as well as the Berlin Wall so that gospel could penetrate these countries and that people could live in freedom. And after many years the Lord answered those prayers. The Berlin wall was taken down in 1989, the Iron curtain was dissolved in 1991, and the Bamboo curtain is hardly mentioned today.

Congregation, kingdoms come and kingdoms go. Kings, Queens, Presidents and Prime Ministers and dictators come and also go. The Stalins, the Hitlers, the Idi Amin’s, the Saddam Hussein’s and many more have come and gone. Governments come and governments go. Nothing lasts forever. And King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and interpretation in our text is also about earthly kings and kingdoms coming and going, except for one.

Daniel, after a night’s prayer is, by way of a vision, told about the King’s dream and its interpretation. Daniel thanks God for revealing it to him. And now Daniel asks Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard (2:14), to bring him to the king. But notice what Arioch does. He claims that he has found Daniel and he has brought him to the king. Arioch was eager to claim at least some of the credit for this stunning turn of events for himself.

I guess that is what some people do. They like to claim some of the praise even though it doesn’t belong to them at all. For a careful reading of the text tells us that it was Daniel who went and found Arioch (v24). And then notice in contrast Daniel’s humble attitude before the king. When Nebuchadnezzar asked Daniel whether he could tell him the dream and its meaning (v26), Daniel could easily have answered, “Yes. Wasn’t that clever of me?”

But instead of promoting himself, Daniel took the opportunity publicly to exalt his God. Daniel clearly gives all credit to the God of heaven who revealed the dream to him. Daniel then tells Nebuchadnezzar his dream in vv 31-35. God has given Nebuchadnezzar his kingdom, a gold kingdom, but after him there will be another kingdom, inferior to Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom. It will be made of silver. Then a third kingdom will come, made of bronze.

Then, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, for iron breaks and smashes everything. But this fourth kingdom will not be united, as the feet and toes indicate, being made partly of baked clay and partly of iron. After the time of those kings and kingdoms, the God of heaven will set up a final kingdom that will never be destroyed. A Rock, not cut by human hands, but a rock that breaks the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold to pieces. This final kingdom will not be left to another people but it will endure forever (Dan 2:36–45). And though this final kingdom starts small, it will grow to fill the earth and unlike the earthly kingdoms.

Now commentators speculate about these other kingdoms but no one knows and it’s not the point of the passage. So what is the point? What is God teaching us? Several things.

First, it shows us that God gives every earthly kingdom its glory and power. As Paul also mentions in Romans 13, there is no authority except those instituted by God. No kingdom or earthly authority come from their own strength. God gave Nebuchadnezzar his unparalleled sovereignty, power, strength, and glory (v37). In fact, in the Hebrew, creation language is used to describe it. Like Adam, he has been given authority not only over people, but over nature itself, so that the beasts of the field and the birds of the air are placed in his hands (v38).

Yet that same creation imagery also underlines the fall. Like Adam, if he sins, he too can be cast down from his exalted position. Daniel’s thanksgiving prayer alludes it in v21. The same God who set him up as king can also depose him. In fact, the destruction of the statue reminds us that every earthly kingdom has an “after this” scenario. No earthly kingdom is forever. The gold gives way to the silver, to the bronze and the iron and so on. Notice also that the progression of kingdoms shows the history of man in rebellion from God. It’s not just a change of kings and kingdoms, but a pattern of change where things progressively get worse.

Even in our own society we can see that. Instead of things getting better, we go from one transient kingdom to another, proceeding downward from gold to silver to bronze to iron. Furthermore, the fourth kingdom mentioned isn’t even united. It is made of iron mixed with baked clay, an uneven mixture that cannot hold together (Dan 2:42–43). The only thing that remains constant about these various kingdoms is their lust for power and their desire to dominate the world (Dan 2:39–40). Nothing new under the sun. The desire to rule and crush remains undiminished throughout the sequence, but ultimately that ambition will also be frustrated. In the final analysis, the kingdoms of this world, however glorious or powerful they may seem, have “feet of clay,” and will not stand against the rock that is coming and has come.

In fact, the imagery of a single statue in the form of a man, says something about human history. The entire human endeavour, although sustained by God in the beginning with unparalleled glory and dominion, ends up in nothing but division and termination. The glory of Adam in Genesis 1–2 gives way to the fall and death and judgment of the flood in Genesis 6–9 and the chaos of life after Babel in Genesis 11. The blessing of the Promised Land and Kings from Ch 12 on ends up in exile.

Even in the modern era, the great blessing of two world wars ending, as well several other wars since, and the removal of evil dictators and tyrants has brought the war of terrorism to our front doors that no one seems to be able to halt. And what about the kingdom of secularism and the moral decline we have seen over several years? Human history is not destined to end with a glorious bang but rather with an embarrassing decay of God's laws and standards.

Second point. The depiction of these changing and ultimately failing earthly kingdoms stands in stark contrast to what replaces them. The final word of history does not lie with a new and improved version of the statue of man. Rather, it lies with the gracious intervention of a loving creator God. Notice the imagery. A rock that is not carved by human hands will strike and demolish the statue and then grow to fill the earth (Dan 2:34–35). The rock in this picture is none other than Jesus Christ. As Jesus said to Peter after his confession, it's on this rock that that Jesus would build his church, his kingdom.

Paul also reminds us of God's plan is to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, King Jesus (Eph. 1:9). This rock, although lacking in glory at the beginning, will grow through the power of God until it ultimately dominates the entire world.

Third point. Congregation, earthly kingdoms will come and go. This world and its constantly changing kingdoms are not what life is all about. This passage challenges us and forces us to ask the question, 'What is my focus, my priorities in this life? Am I investing all my time and energy and resources into an earthly kingdom that will ultimately fall, or do I invest and cling to the ultimate King and His kingdom? Yes, I know it is easy to become discouraged about the heavenly kingdom, after all the growth doesn't seem to be all that dynamic, and even our own growth in holiness isn't all that great. However, don't be tempted to despair.

In fact, when our earthly hopes and dreams are in tatters, and our lives are being crushed painfully under the ungodly rule of the kingdoms of this world, we need to remember that this world is not ultimate. In today's climate we can so easily despair when we see the rise of ungodly governments or when we consider the influence of secularism on our society. And the moral decline, and general immorality that we see being promoted with such things same sex marriage, the so called "safe schools programs" all cause us concern. But don't despair, this kingdom will pass too.

Or more personally, when we face sickness, isolation, and disability, even death itself, we need to remember that there is a kingdom that lasts beyond the grave. There is a time coming when the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ (see Rev. 11:15). By the way, when we feel like the head of gold, we need to remember that there will be an "after this," also for us. Whether we are rich or poor, well known or just plain "John or Jane" there will come a day when all of our little triumphs and glories will lie in the dust and we will stand before the great Creator to give an account.

Point four. When that final day comes, what will count will not be whether we are gold or silver or bronze or even iron mixed with clay, but our standing on the Rock. In Luke 20 Jesus told the parable of the son of the vineyard owner whom the tenants rejected and killed. He then quoted Psalm 118, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," and added, "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed" (Luke 20:17–18).

The last words in that prophecy come straight from Daniel 2:44–45, and by quoting them Jesus was identifying himself as Israel's Messiah, the stone which crushes all those who do not bow in submission to him. The kingdoms of this world advance by power and conquest, and glory in their strength. Luke 20 teaches us that the kingdom of God advances through suffering and death, a pattern in which Jesus' own death led the way.

By that death, he brings life to all who will come and bow down before him, receiving his salvation as a free gift that comes by faith. And yes, his kingdom starts out small, as Jesus pointed out in the parable of the mustard seed. Yet it grows into the mightiest of trees (Matt. 13:31–32). Sometimes earthly kingdoms are impressive. Trudy and I once went from Manly to Circular Quay on Sydney harbour. And to our surprise, one of America's aircraft carriers, the Kitty Hawk, was docked close by. It was massive and very impressive. What a powerful nation and kingdom.

But the future belongs to God's kingdom. Luke 20 reminds us that those who stubbornly refuse to submit to Jesus and who refuse to recognize the capstone will be crushed by it. Or if you like, the Rock will shatter them and they will become like chaff (v35). For Daniel, the coming of the Rock was a future event, something to which he and his fellow exiles could look forward to in the midst of their suffering and heart break being away from the Promised Land. For us, the coming of the Rock is both past and future. Jesus Christ has come into the world and established his kingdom. God calls us even now to submit to the Rock and seek first his kingdom.

If you have never bowed your heart to Jesus Christ and asked for his pardon and forgiveness, then now is the time to take that step. Yep, it will break you to pieces, but it will shape you, making you realize that your only hope is Christ. We must also recognize that even though the kingdom of God is growing throughout the world, the present will continue to be a time of trials and difficulties until Christ's return. We are therefore to pray passionately for that day.

But while we wait, we need to be like Daniel and his friends (vv 48-49). These men didn't isolate themselves from the kingdom of this world. Rather, they poured themselves into seeking the welfare of their temporary home in Babylon (Jer 29:5-7). The challenge for us is to keep these things in balance. On the one hand, some Christians have their eyes fixed on the return of Christ so intently that they are literally of no earthly use.

But if God intended our attention to be exclusively focused on him right now, he would take us to be with him immediately, where we could fulfil that purpose far more adequately. The fact that he has not chosen to do so suggests that he has earthly work for us to complete in the meantime. We therefore need to take seriously our duty to pursue the blessing of the earthly communities in which we find ourselves.

On the other hand, some Christians are so busy pursuing programs of earthly transformation for Christ that they have lost sight of the heavenly goal. As Ian Duguid says in his commentary, "They are busy polishing the statue instead of looking for the Rock."

Congregation, this world is not our home. At best it is merely a lodging point along the way. Doesn't mean we just sit back and let the world go by. On the contrary, we are to be a salting slat and a light on a hill. And while we are doing that our primary calling is to bow down and worship God. This was Nebuchadnezzar's response to the dream and its interpretation. Note vv 46-47; "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery". This same response should be ours as well.

In light of our own great salvation and the eternal kingdom that awaits us, we have a 'more-so' to respond with an overflowing joy that God's kingdom is ultimate and that in Jesus Christ his sovereignty is established forever! One day we shall see clearly that the Rock reigns! Bow down and worship now before it is too late. Come again quickly Lord Jesus. Amen!