

Remember He's in Charge

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Pastor Jeff Wood

A guy was in some rather dark restaurant. It was very hard to see and he could make out that he was next to a woman. He asked her if he she wanted to hear a blond joke. She replied, "I'm 6' tall and was a boxer in last year's Olympics and I am blond. Next to me is my friend who is blond and is 6' 2" and is the state kick boxing champion. She's blond. Next to her is our friend who is 6' 5" and is the captain of a NCAA champion basketball team. Also, blond. Are you sure you want to tell a blond joke?" He answered, "No, I don't want to have to explain it three times."

There are things hard to explain all around us and some of them can cause us distress. Maybe you have felt something in the last few months about another three – N. Korea's Kim Jong Un, America's Donald Trump, and Russia's Vladimir Putin. If you have, then you'll get something of what is in our text this morning. Or, if the geopolitical scene is too far off for you, maybe you can relate to a typical trio of cancer, reaction to drugs, and seeing loved ones suffer. Or feeling dismay at a crooked mechanic, lawyer, and government official in your world.

We come to a text that may feel like coming to a Salvador Dali painting. It's in Daniel. It's full of symbolism and if you kept in mind how a bald eagle, a bear, and a lion employed in political cartoons would mean America, Russia, and England, you'll be somewhat equipped to handle the text. In it, not three, but four beasts appear in sequence, one supplanting the next. The scene gets told in other ways in Daniel, most notably as a statue where it goes from gold to silver to bronze to iron with clay. But it is, in the first order and most rightly, about a succession of nation states, one invading another and all the violence and mayhem that goes with such. It can, I would suggest, be applied to whatever colludes and collides with us in our worlds causing us grief, fear, dismay, and/or pain.

How's it to be understood? Handled? That's our question.

We read/pray.

How's it to be understood and handled? What does the Bible say? Notice first what it does not say. It does not say where the beasts came from. They simply come on the scene one after another. There is no explanation of their origin. No where they came from. They are instigators of displacement and pain and they just are. And evil just is.

This is very different than many a modern American. When there is some evil messing with our worlds and causing us fear and tears, we want to know ... why God let this happen? Why this earthquake, this epidemic, this market crash, this diagnosis, this death ... and why did you, O God, let this happen? Hardly is the question put, "Satan, why are you so malevolent?" But the question to God is one arising from some disfigured faith for if there is no God, there is no question. If one did ask it, the answer would be, "Why not?"¹ There would be no way ultimately of even claiming something is evil or good. It just would be ... something.²

And while there is a Christian response to the pain behind the question and very good responses of thoughtful explanation, what is here simply is that evil exists, that it rises up, that one verse gives way to a second verse of it and it is a second verse but a whole lot like the

¹ Many, disappointed with God, dismiss him as if saying he is not, means that he is not. And that they are now, having done so, in a better off place. But how is that so? That anguish or anger or question just now goes into empty space with no empathy or resistance or answer.

² "We" know what is good, we say. Just like slave owners knew what was good and that was commonly accepted? Or Isis has its good and that is in their culture readily accepted? Or the Third Reich working for good of humankind through eugenics? No, good (and evil) just become moving targets without God giving us definition of that.

first.³ You might even shout and a whole lot louder and whole lot worse!

While the passage doesn't tell us in any detail right here where the evil is from or why it is there, it does tell us how God responds to it. First of all, he responds, if I can put it this way, "humanely." See the beasts are *beasts* and in contrast the one on the throne and a Son of Man who are human or human-like. It's evil that is rabid and God who is good. Evil doesn't have a heart, doesn't shed a tear, but God does. Wherever there is human suffering and an angry or desperate question flies to heaven about it, see Jesus with you seeing that suffering. Look into his face. Look into his eyes. You won't see anything impassive there. You will see the most humane face in all the universe bar none.

The text says something else. I love, and we all probably do, those story movements where, let's say, someone discovers a secret garden and they push through the door into it, and then they see in the garden a little house, and they go into it, and then they see in the little house, a chest, and they move toward it and open it, and then they find a box inside the chest and they open it, and then they find a locket in the box, and they open it, ... and when we do all of that sort of movement with the universe, with truth, with reality, with life ... what do we find at the center? Like a heart vital to the body, like a mind to life, we find heaven. At the epicenter of life is heaven and at the epicenter of heaven is the throne and at the epicenter of the throne is God.

None of it is chaotic. None of it is fretful. None of it is hurried, nor harried, nor uneasy, nor unsettled, nor brash. It is in a word, "Composed." It is in a word, "Knowing." "Competent." "Ruling." In a word, maybe two, "In charge."

³ The Christian response is to weep with those who weep. Being intellectual with those in pain is out of season. When the season is right, the path to explore is God setting up, lovingly we should add, a world of order with cause and effect, with responsibility, and with free will. God stopping all the things we human beings would want him to stop, would really void human life of what makes it dear.

While the text doesn't say right here exactly where the evil and its frothing comes from, it does say very directly, so simply, so plainly, ... it does say God will meet it. It will not have free reign. It will not go unmet or unchecked or unfettered or unhindered or unstopped or unjudged or left in any way unaccountable. The Supreme Potentate, who is God, will meet it, face it, defeat it, end it. Period. Genesis has the language of the serpent biting his heel but this doesn't even have that. It is all about "he will *crush* its head."

This exact point is made elsewhere in Daniel, whether it is by lions in Daniel's den having their mouths shut or a megalomaniacal Nebuchadnezzar humbled until he praises God, or a debauched Belshazzar deposed or a fiery furnace rendered cool ... God is the master and he may tarry for his purposes but he will, he will, he will and he has and he has and he has had the last word.

When Jesus was killed, which this table before us today speaks to, he was just prior questioned, "Are you the Son of the Blessed One, the Christ?" And Jesus replied with the words of this Daniel passage today, that he would be seen seated with God, with God's power, and coming on clouds as if the thunderstorm was his chariot. His inquisitors then charged him with blasphemy and off they took him to face death but in it was HIM seeing, facing, meeting, defeating, once and for all, sin and death. Whatever residue of sin and death continues, it cannot and will not escape the cross and the empty tomb and the throne and the one who sits on the throne. This is surely the word of the Lord.

If you'd like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors & elders of the church would welcome your call. revjeffwood@gmail.com

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