|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Topic | A Dictator’s Nightmare  |
| Reference  | Daniel 2: 1 – 49 |
| Date | 10 September 2016 |
| Speaker | Br Yee Dian |

Historically, the Book of Daniel together with Esther and Ezekiel and portions of Jeremiah are constitutes of what is known as the **Exilic Literature** in the Bible. Exilic is from the word exile, meaning they document the 70 years of Jewish exile in the 7th century BC but the Book of Daniel stands out in this exilic literature because it also contains many prophesies that are yet to be fulfilled and in my thinking will be fulfilled soon, which makes Daniel a really exciting book to study.

Daniel went to a foreign land of spiritual darkness; it is what so many of us are facing nowadays. We are all in exile, even if we don’t feel that we are in an exile, but slowly and surely exile is coming to us.

There are two main forces in the Book of Revelation that are engineered by Satan to try to derail God’s plans as we approach the end times and these two forces against us are:

1. Liberalism.
2. Islamism.

Sometimes it is good for us not to be too caught up in our little world and to be too engross our patty issues and struggles which may seem very big to us, rather we should also look around us from a broader perspective and see what is happening nationally or even globally and to appreciate what God is doing on a much larger scale and that would help us to enlarge our vision of God and to understand who He really is and then perhaps our problems will seem smaller. Now the Book of Daniel is one book that will help us to do that because it tells us how God is moving through the pages of history, it speaks of his power and sovereignty.

**LIBERALISM**

The first major force acting in opposition to our faith is **liberalism**. It is largely godless or even anti-God in nature. Its central doctrine is that we all can make the world a better place and mankind can do it provided sudden conditions are met. It places man right in the center of the universe, God is not needed, and in fact God has been put into some kind of exile. Liberalism has its roots in communism and socialism. It is a long study of 20th century history. It came out of Europe and has largely taken over Europe and now it is sweeping North America. It may not have fully arrived at our shores yet but it will through Western culture that comes like tidal waves in the form of music, movies, advertisements and news. The liberal agenda wants to do away with class distinction, which in itself is sound because we also believe in equality of human beings that all human beings are created equal in the sight of God, so they have a very noble goal to try to abolish class distinction and often the goals of liberalism are noble in nature but the results of their actions in touching those goals are sometimes disastrous if not outright unbiblical.

We have two examples of it.

1. Because the liberal agenda wants to abolish class distinction it hates to see the gap between the rich and the poor, the haves and have nots that itself is a noble goal but is also explains why Western countries with strong liberal climate they all have extensive welfare programs. The government will help you; will take care of you if you are unable to work for some reason. The unfortunate result of this uncontrolled welfare system is shear laziness and on the other hand the Bible teaches us that we need to be hardworking. Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 3:10

*For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.”*

Furthermore **Proverbs 6:6** (NLT)

*Take a lesson from the ants, you lazybones. Learn from their ways and become wise!*

1. The second bigger example is more frightening. In their efforts to achieve a classless utopia the liberals champion gender equality. Why should a woman be paid less than a man for the same work, now again this in itself is a noble goal but liberalism takes it to the extreme and tries to blur the distinction between male and female. Towards most of us it is either a male or a female but not to New York City, a very liberal place. To New York City there can be many shades of gender in between and they have now officially recognized 31 different gender identities besides woman and man. The Bible tells us about gender. The bible tells about gender in **Genesis 1:27**

*So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.*

So God didn’t created so many genders. There is nothing in between, it is either a male or a female. So clearly what is happening in this world can be seen as a veil attempt to distort God’s creation order. Now to stretch it a little further this preoccupation with gender helps to explain their tolerance or even embrace of the LBGT agenda. It also explains their support for same sex marriage and many liberals are very passionate about these issues and hence on June 25, 2015 when the US Supreme Court legalized same sex marriage across America the liberals celebrated this decision including Obama and his democratic party and this is what President Obama said after the supreme court made its landmark ruling. He said, *“… this ruling is a victory for America.”* and later in the same speech he also declared *“What an extraordinary achievement.”*

Homosexuality is an abomination to God. The Bible speaks strongly against this sin. Leviticus 18:22 *Do not practice homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman. It is a detestable sin.*

Paul also has strong words against the sin of homosexuality in **Romans 1:27 (NLT)** *…the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved.*

So following the Supreme Court ruling in June 2015, the Whitehouse was lighted up and the colors of the rainbow which is the symbol of the LBGT movement. This is hugely significant because the Whitehouse is the seat of the greatest political power on earth. So it shows that same sex marriage is no longer just a social issue, it is now enjoying political backing. The city of London also stood in solidarity with Washington DC. The famous London landmark, the London Eye was also lighted up in rainbow colors and another famous landmark in Berlin, Germany, the Brandenburg Gate was also similarly lighted as if to say we Germans are with you. In fact many buildings in Western countries were lighted up in similar fashion immediately after this Supreme Court decision to show their support for same sex marriage.

Our world is changing and the greatest danger is that it is happening very subtly and very quietly. Now some of us might think that these phenomena largely confined to the west, they will never get here, but we just have to wait and see.

**ISLAMISM**

There is another danger, Islamism which is hostile to our faith. The black color of ISIS flag symbolizes the other growing darkness enveloping the world today and they have caused havoc not only in Syria and Iraq where many Christians have been persecuted and slaughtered, their tentacles of destruction have also reached Belgium, France, America, Turkey and even Bangladesh. Less than two weeks ago Malaysian police apparently foiled a planned ISIS attack right here in Kuala Lumpur. The worrying factor is that there are so many groups and individuals around the world who have pledged allegiance to ISIS including people here in Malaysia and this is their plan for global caliphate. Now even if we don’t think of ISIS as an eminent threat to our faith, Islamism as a trend is very- very real in this country. You will agree that our government, our institutions and our society have undergone a lot of Islamisation over the past 20-30 years. The history text books that they are using in our schools today, you will be alarmed and will be shocked.

Now much Malaysia has changed over the past few decades. To put all of this across in the nutshell the world is increasingly Babylonized. We don’t have to go to Babylon because the Babylon is coming to you and we have to ask ourselves, how we are going to deal with this new environment, we too have to ask ourselves, how are we going to respond to this new reality that exile is really upon us. In other words how are we to conduct ourselves as believers in an increasingly unbelieving world? How did Daniel and his three friends conduct themselves in Babylon?

Interestingly in the field of Sociology there is Berry’s Acculturation Model developed by Professor John Berry which describes what happens when a culture finds itself in another bigger culture and basically it is either marginalization or separation or assimilation or integration in that order. Let’s put marginalization aside. Do we separate or do we assimilate or do we integrate. Now to answer this let’s take a look at what the Israelites did when they arrived at Babylon. Now from the Book of Ezekiel and also some archaeological sources and some of the diggings they did in Iraq we know that exiles were settled along a site called Nippur which is a short distance from the city of Babylon.

The Jewish when first arrived into Babylon, their first instinct when they arrived was to separate themselves and not to assimilate into the pagan culture of the Babylonians. They even had leaders telling them, don’t go into the city. They have nothing to do with the city, don’t mix with this pagans and there was even a false prophet by the name of Hananiah who told them falsely that God will soon destroy the Babylonian empire in about two years’ time and they could all go home to Judah and this is recorded in Jeremiah 28. In other words, ‘do not let the exile get into you, be separate from them because we are all going home soon’. But God has had other plans and often God does things contrarily to human wisdom so he instructed Jeremiah who was in Jerusalem at that time to send an urgent letter to the Israelites in exile and someone carried the letter to the Israelites in Babylon and this letter takes up a big part of Jeremiah 29 but the gist of the letter is from verses 47.

*This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”*

In other words they were not supposed to separate themselves completely from the Babylonians. They were supposed to participate in their economy. They were even supposed to pray for the city for its peace and prosperity and not pray against it, but neither should they assimilate rather they must keep their faith, because further down in verse 13 in this chapter they were told to seek God with all their hearts. So it was not supposed to be complete separation, nor was it supposed to be total assimilation, perhaps the best word is integration which was what Daniel and his three friends did. They kept the faith while at the same time embracing the host culture, art, literature, etc. and that is why they were able to rise through the ranks in the king’s court and be counted among the king’s wise man or advisors which set the stage for Daniel to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in chapter 2. He was at the right place at the right time because he was so well integrated into the Babylonian system.

How should we believers conduct ourselves in an unbelieving world, this world of increasing darkness brought about the subtle spread of liberalism and also the rapid rise of Islamism? Are we retreating more and more into the confines and comfort zones of the church or are we integrating well with the people and culture around us. My take of this situation is this that while we participate in the local economy that is for sure we also tend to surround ourselves with people whom we are comfortable with, people who share our culture, our values and faith, in other words we practice a high degree of separation from the majority culture.

There are few specific things that we can do. Same of them simple things to help us break out of our coconut shell and be more connected with the majority people of this country.

**Integration Exercise**

1. If you are an employer or a business owner, don’t hire only those who are of the same race or religion as yours.
2. If you are an employee working in a big office, don’t befriend only those who are of the same race or religion as yours.
3. Don’t patronize only shops or businesses owned by people who are of the same race or religion as yours.
4. Start conversations with people who are not of the same race or religion as yours – taxi drivers, security guards, bank tellers, etc.
5. Learn to speak fluently the language of the majority people in this country.

Sometimes integration is not something you want to do or feel like doing, sometimes integration is something you have to do or you must do and I once had such an experience on April 2, 1979, 37 years ago at the age of 19, I left for my further studies in Japan. When I arrived in Tokyo in 1979 the only Japanese words I knew were ‘yamaha’, ‘toyota’, ‘suzuki’ but in the five years in spent in Japan I had to learn the language and embrace the culture and by the end of my stay I was so fully integrated that I could walk into a restaurant and nobody could tell that I was a foreigner because I spoke like them, I dress like them, I behave like them and some people tell me that even now my mannerism is still very Japanese.

Let us now draw some lessons from Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2 which I hope will give us some \_\_ to carry out some of the practical suggestion that I gave you just now. We have king Nebuchadnezzar who said something like this in verse 3

*…he said to them, “I have had a dream…”*

But the problem was that he refused to say what the dream was and this happened in the earlier part of the chapter which was not read to us. He was troubled by the dream and so he summoned all his wise man to interpret the dream for him and so that he could be sure that they were not cheating him. So the king wanted them to also tell the dream, but of course they couldn’t and this is when back and forth for a while until the king was so furious in verse 12 that he ordered all the wise man of Babylon to be executed. Now if we recall how Daniel and his three friends were so well integrated that they rose through the ranks and were serving as wise man in the king’s court, it turned out that they to were to be executed along with the other wise man from 13. In verse 18 Daniel together with his three friends pleaded with God for mercy and that very night in verse 19 God revealed the mystery to Daniel.

In verses 24 and 25 we see Daniel approaching Arioch, the king’s commander who was to carry out the executions and he asked Arioch to arrange for him to see the king so that he could interpret the dream for the king and Arioch did accordingly. The next group of verses from 26 to 30 so Daniel appeared before the king but he quickly pointed out that his ability to tell the dream and to interpret is was not on its own, but he gave all credit to God whom he described as the revealer of mysteries and he said it twice in verses 28 and 29 and the dream that Nebuchadnezzar so turned out to be a prophetic vision because Daniel described it as things to come and what is going to happen in verse 29. He then proceeded to tell the dream to the king from verses 31 to 35 which consisted of two parts. In the first part the king saw a large statue with five sections. In the second part the dreamed he witnessed a rock smashing the statue to pieces.

Now let us first examine the statue. The statue had a

* head of gold,
* chest and arms of silver,
* belly and thighs of bronze,
* legs of iron and lastly the feet made of a mixture of iron and clay

From verses 32 and 33.

The statue was described as enormous and dazzling and awesome experience from verse 31. The statue was beautiful and majestic and he might be inspired by the statue in the dream to actually built one later in chapter 3 to honor himself and so the statue in the dream didn’t frightened him in my opinion rather it was the rock that smashed his statue that got him very disturbed. What or who was this rock? He wanted to know desperately and besides the statue also needed some interpretation why was it made from different metals. From verses 36 to 43 Daniel proceeded to interpret the dream, the meaning of the statue for the king. Now there are five different sections from head to toes representing five different empires, one after the other, five different types of materials that were used, each one harder than the one before it, meaning each subsequent empire will be stronger than the previous one. So in verse 38 Daniel identified the first empire representing by the golden head, this was the Babylonian empire of which Nebuchadnezzar was the supreme ruler. The first empire represented by the golden head lasted only less than 70 years starting from 606 BC by 539 BC. The Babylonians were concurred by the Medo-Persian empire, the second one, represented by the silver chest and arms. They were more powerful than Babylonian and they soon took over, they lasted about 200 years. Now the two silver arms are significant because this second empire was actually a fusion of two empires, the Median empire and the Persian empire that is why we call it Medo-Persian empire and hence the two arms, but in 331 BC Alexander the great came along and destroyed the Medo-Persian empire and he established the Greek empire represented by the bronze belly and thighs. The Greek empire also did not last and by 31 BC the even more powerful and even bigger Roman empire was really in place and was represented by two iron legs and by the time Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the Romans were the unchallenged rulers in the known role but why the two legs because Roman empire was later divided into two halves, the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire if you look into history. The fifth and last section of the statue was the two feet made of mixture of clay and iron, what did they represent. This is the most interesting subject of much debate and speculation. In this interpretation Daniel emphasized a lot on the 10 toes of the feet which points to a divided kingdom, he mentioned the word divided kingdom from verse 41. I have read so many views on this and I believe the most possible angle is that the 10 toes collectively represented modern day, present day Europe which took shape gradually in the aftermath of the collapse of the Roman empire and now we are entering the realm of speculation hence I do not wish to dwell too much on this but Daniel did mentioned in verse 42 that this was a mixture of iron and clay meaning a mixture of a strong and a weak and he interpret as some states in this divided kingdom will be strong, some will be weak which seems to support the Europe theory because among the countries of Europe some are strong like Britain and France, some are weaker like Austria and Belgium. Some also add USA and Canada as part of the feet of iron and clay because they see these two countries as extensions of Europe. So whatever these countries are, they too will not last.

Now we look at the second part of the dream, the rock, which seems to come from nowhere. It flew in and smashed the statue and this is the key, the rock is the key that would unlock chapter 2.

The lesson for us is this, kingdom comes and kingdoms go, empires come and empires go. Adolph Hitler thought that his third right would last a 1000 years, he was so confident but it lasted only 12 years. No power on earth can last forever; rather it is the Sovereign Lord, the ultimate ruler who dictates the rise and fall of nations and governments. Kings and presidents and political leaders they may think that they are the ones writing the pages of history, but it is almighty God who determines the cause of human history. Indeed the well-known saying ring so true **that man proposes God disposes**. Means that human beings that can make whatever plans they want but it is God who ultimately descends, as God is always in control. There is nothing that has happened or is happening or whatever happens that is outsight His sovereign will and hence when we look at rise of ISIS we know with confidence that God is in control. When we see a powerful head of state who is utterly corrupt we know for sure that God is in control. God is still in charge which is part of today’s sermon title and this is the first main lesson from Daniel 2.

Let us now quickly turn to the second part of the dream, the rock, which is from verses 34 and 35. Now according to Daniel the rock struck the statue and smashed it to pieces which become like the husk of grains only to be swept away by the wind leaving nothing behind and then the rock became huge mountain and filled the entire earth. Now the NIV is not very clear about how the rock struck the statue but if we check other translations the rock actually hit the statue at its feet of iron and clay. Now this may be meaningful that the rock would destroy the last empire on earth, Europe and USA, and together with all the earlier empires they were all being wept away from the pages of history, in other words they will be forgotten in the aftermath of the coming of the rock.

Who is this rock? Nebuchadnezzar was desperate to know. Now if we think in terms of kingdoms in a sequence from past to present to future what kingdom will this rock represent. Now after interpreting the statue Daniel proceeded to interpret the rock for the king from verses 44 to 45. Now he gave two clues as to the identity of the rock. Now firstly he says that the rock represented a kingdom that God himself will set up and it will never be destroyed that will last for forever so it will be an eternal kingdom and secondly, the second clue is that the rock was cut out not by human hands, meaning that the kingdom will not be one that is established by human beings rather it is going to be a divine kingdom, but the question is who will rule over this eternal kingdom. So we know this rock represents eternal kingdom but who is going to rule over it. There can only be one person who has the quality or qualification to rule over this eternal kingdom of God at the end of human history. There is only one person in my mind who fits this symbol of the rock and it is none other than Jesus Christ, but how do we know for sure, how can I just say that. Daniel did not say that the rock was a person, much less identified him. Now to answer this question we read further down in Daniel and we find the answer in Daniel chapter 7 where God granted him another vision and in that vision God gave him more details about this eternal kingdom in Daniel chapter 7. In the middle of that chapter Daniel 7 he saw something very specific in the vision and it says in Daniel 7 verses 13 and 14, two very important verses in the Old Testament

*“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

It says that all nations and people will worship him that is why we had the rock becoming a mountain that filled the entire earth. What Daniel saw was a person who was going to rule over this eternal kingdom, he used the term son of man, because he did not know his name at that time, just who is this son of man. If we go through all the four gospels you will find that the term son of man repeated 78 times in the gospel and they all refer to Jesus, in fact when Jesus referred to himself he preferred to use the title son of man rather than son of God, we call him son of God but he preferred to call himself son of man because he wanted the people to know that he is a very person in the vision that Daniel saw in chapter 7.

The other main lesson we learn is that there will surely come a time which I believe will be soon when God will establish his kingdom on earth and Jesus will come and rule over this eternal kingdom. So what if you know this, knowing this should give us hope, a kind of blessed hope that motivates us, that encourages us that our present troubles whether personal or national or global will soon give way to a beautiful and bright future and we shall be with Jesus in his presence safe in his arms for eternity. This is the future, this is the hope we have and this future this hope that we have is so vividly depicted in the last chapter of the Bible in Revelation 22:12~13

*“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.*

How do we then link these two main lessons from Daniel 2 to our earlier lesson about living in exile?

1. Our keen awareness that God is always in control should enable us to engage the world with confidence and faith.
2. The living hope of a blessed future that we breathe should propel us to want to share it with people around us.

We are in this world but not of this world meaning that we don’t belong to this world. It does not mean that we disassociate ourselves from the world perhaps the better way of putting is this we are in this world, we are for this world in a sense that we are for the people in this world and we want them to know this God who is always in control and we want them to also share in the blessed hope that we have.

***May we all go out and integrate and connect and spread the love of Jesus and his gospel.***