

Dreamworks

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[0 : 00] Now I mentioned last week that the titles of these sermons are related to films. Well I'm slightly changing that today because the title today is Dreamworks, which is not a film but it's a film production company.

Okay, so it's not a film and maybe you're thinking well that's great if it's not a film title, maybe we're not getting a sermon. Nailuck, that's not going to happen. And that's all I'm going to say about Dreamworks, other than obviously.

This is all about a dream and this is all about God who himself and the life of this king through this amazing dream that speaks about the future.

Now I just want to make some general points by way of introduction if you'll stick with me here. And part of it is reflecting a little bit on last week. When you've only got half an hour to do a sermon on narrative like Daniel, obviously you're selective in what you choose and then sometimes you kind of mull it over and think about it again.

And I just wish I'd placed a little bit more emphasis last week when we talked about Daniel who decided not to eat the king's food. The tremendous control he had over his appetites and how important that was for him.

[1 : 15] And maybe the question for us as we just consider as we meditate a little bit on the truth of scriptures. What place do our appetites have? Physical appetites, all of the different appetites we have.

What do they have over our life? Because what he was really saying was I'll not have my appetites govern my life. I'll allow the lordship of God and obedience to God to govern my life.

I think that's a challenge for us because very often we're driven by our appetites and we're driven by what we really want ourselves. And God can sometimes be at the background to that or he can be the kind of the one that we look to to give us what we want.

And it's kind of the rubber stamp on what we want so that we really just want our own way. But if we happen to get our own way, we'll stamp it with prayer and say, well, that's what God's will is for us.

And sometimes that's not the case. Man, Jesus says doesn't live by bread alone and that's a very significant fact. So our lives are to be more than just our appetites and the fulfilling of our appetites, whatever they happen to be as we consider them.

[2 : 28] By way of introduction also, I wonder again, I want to challenge us about the place of prayer in our lives. Because already what we're beginning to see in Daniel is that this is a book about the sovereignty of God.

God who is sovereign over the whole of humanity. But we've also already seen he's a sovereign God. Now, listen for this. He works through the prayers of his people.

He chooses to work. So we've got Daniel and we'll begin to see in this chapter that Daniel's prayers are already beginning to be answered in incredible ways. So God who is sovereign works through the prayers of his people of ourselves as we pray.

So that, you know, we have this great truth of the sovereignty of God. But the amazing reality is that sovereign God chooses to act and work through, not exclusively, but through our prayers.

Now, if we're not praying much, does that mean we've got a high view of God or a low view of God? I tend to think we've got a low view of his sovereignty.

[3 : 32] God is less sovereign to us, less significant, less glorious, less important. And the more we see who he is, the more we want as believers to recognize him as our Father, our Father who loves to hear us and who chooses indeed to work through our prayers.

Amazing truth as we'll see a little bit of that in this chapter. And then just briefly also by way of introduction, a penny for our thoughts.

Is it almost an incidental truth to this chapter here? But isn't it an important truth that God knows your thoughts? Isn't that an amazing truth that you think about?

You know, how kind of mind blowing and a little bit scary it is that God is a spirit, but God's a spirit who knows our minds, who understands our minds and who knows them, who knows our thoughts, who involves himself in the mind processes and the thoughts and the dreams that we have in our lives.

Christ knows it. Christ knew what the people were thinking very often. We're told that in the Gospels. Christ knew what they were thinking. You know, and we kind of, we skim over that as if that's kind of just ordinary, of course.

[4 : 44] Christ knew what they were thinking. But that's a remarkable thought, is it not? Will our outward behavior then cut it? Because isn't that often what we do? We just behave in an outwardly moral or moralistic way and think that that might cut it.

Do we try and run from God by not praying and by not opening His Word and by not speaking to Him, as if somehow He will not know what we're thinking or the rebellion that might be in our hearts?

And so in the Christian church, whatever we should do, whatever we should be, I think it should be marked by honesty, shouldn't it? And humility, knowing that God knows and knowing that He still accepts us through Jesus Christ.

And the thing which Christ, what did the Christ rail about most? He railed about hypocrisy most, didn't He? He couldn't stand it, particularly among the religious, the church-going leaders and people of the day.

He couldn't stand their hypocrisy because they, there was a pretense that they were holy and they were righteous and they were good and they were upright. But God knew their hearts and He couldn't, Jesus just couldn't stand hypocrisy.

[5 : 55] Saying you were one thing and pretending you're one thing or saying you're one thing but actually being another. And that in a sense comes through all of this as well and is very significant.

So can I just say a few things about Daniel chapter 2? And obviously by the very nature of this, it's going to be skimming the chapter. Looking at the three main players, there's Nebuchadnezzar and there's the advisors and then there's Daniel.

They're the three main players. And Nebuchadnezzar, and I'm not going to go over the story again, but Nebuchadnezzar was probably the most powerful person in the world, in the civilized world of that time.

He was a dictatorial ruler of a very powerful nation Babylon, an empire. But he's an interesting character because he's a concoction, isn't he?

He's a mixture. He's a mixture of power and fear. So he has great power and you can see that in this chapter. He can kind of snap his fingers and say what he wants, but he's also fearful.

[6 : 51] He's paranoid. He's driven in his life by fear of losing what he has and by seeking the favor of those around him.

I can't think of many modern parables, but sorry, modern parallels to that, but possibly Kim Jong-un would be one in North Korea, quite similar, obviously not as dominant in a world scenario, but there's that kind of mixture of fear and strength and power that is frightening for anyone person to have.

But he has dreams, you know? And these dreams, they paralyze him and it cause him to fear because he's got no control over them. And they're threatening his peace and they're threatening.

He knows there's some kind of message coming through them and it's threatening him. So he threatens others in a kind of way to deal with it. This world dominating person is defeated by a dream.

So he can't deal with that and he can't dominate and be powerful over it. And I do wonder here whether this is part of an answer to prayer now and it's slightly conjecturing here.

[8 : 10] But Daniel was clearly a man of prayer, we see that in the first chapter and throughout the book. And we know he's risen with his three other friends to a position of power. And it would be incredulous for Daniel not to be praying and not to be praying about the king, about King Nebuchadnezzar and not also to be praying for an opportunity to influence the king.

I don't believe for a moment that Daniel wouldn't have prayed to influence this king of Babylon and what he was doing. Was this the way that God began to answer Daniel's prayer?

This is one small God intervention in the life of Nebuchadnezzar. He implants a dream to the life of Nebuchadnezzar, King Neb. It's easier to say, it's a bit shorter.

And this one intervention exposes Nebuchadnezzar's life of self-reliance and the poor foundation that he had.

You know, sometimes God still works like that. One act, one intervention, one movement towards us that might reveal your own self-reliance and your own poor foundations.

[9 : 27] So sometimes we shake our fists and we rail against God. But he may be acting in your life in a way that will expose your need to come to him for your foundation and for your dependence in life.

We can be Occibi Christians for a long, long time and be hugely independent, not trusting, not relying on the living God, but really relying on our own power and our own strength and our own influence.

So Nebuchadnezzar, he's the first character. The second characters, or the characters here, group of characters, are the advisors. The poor advisors, I feel quite sorry for the advisors.

They're Nebuchadnezzar's trusted civil service. More than that, really, they're his religious, scientific advisors. The political community that were around Nebuchadnezzar.

Some would say the hangar's on. That's harsh. I don't think they were hangars on. I think they were very highly intelligent. They had an important role to play and they were really valued advisors.

[10 : 31] They were the best in the country. But, you know, the request in verse three that he makes of them is outrageous, isn't it? I'm going to say verse three. It's slightly later than that.

Where he says, no, I don't just want you to interpret the dream. I want you to tell me the dream. Sorry? Tell you the dream and interpret it?

But that is no one's ever done that. Kind of remind me of the change of attitude. Again, this is a kind of age thing. Although you can still get it on some of these minor channels on the TV.

Yes, minister. Humphrey from Yes, Ministers is the kind of suave, sophisticated civil servant who's really the prime minister, the truth be told. He's really the one in charge.

But occasionally he moves from the suave, casual, in control civil servant to one of blind panic when he sees that the prime minister is actually going to make his own mind up on something and not listen to his advice.

[11 : 28] This is kind of similar to the advisors here. They're all kind of fairly casual. Yes, King, tell us your dream and we'll interpret it. And then of course he's saying, no, I want you to tell me what the dream is.

And there's panic. No one's ever asked us to do that. And it's an unfair request. You see, at this point, obviously, they have nothing to offer.

The wisdom that they had, the wisdom they built up, the intelligence they had, it simply had no point of reference here and it couldn't be of any use in this situation.

There needed to be some kind of help from outside and they couldn't provide that. Nothing that they could do. Now, there's often situations where the kind of wisdom and the intelligence and the knowledge and the insight of this world simply doesn't cut it for us.

You know, I've often said that here. You've heard me say this often. You know, I don't want a high ranking scientist at the funeral at the grave side of a friend of mine because they have nothing to say, nothing to offer at that point in terms of their insight and knowledge.

[12 : 42] There is so much of the world and it's all valuable and it's all good, but it simply doesn't cut it at the most basic and personal point of human need.

And Nebuchadnezzar's been driven to this point and the advisors have been driven to a point where they say, this is where we need God and we need God's wisdom and God's insight and God's knowledge.

We recognize science as its rightful place and knowledge and philosophy as its rightful place, but it's science and philosophy of the gaps. So often we hear of the God of the gaps is not that.

God is sovereign and all knowing the rest of the things are in the gaps. They have no ultimate answers. It is God who provides for you and for me the ultimate answer for our existence, for our reason for being, for our presence and our present, for our future.

He is the reason for me and the reason for you is in God and it's not in the wisdom that the world is offering. So there's these two characters and then there's Daniel, verse 14 forward, and Daniel has a lot and his three friends with him also have a lot of important truth to share in this chapter.

[13 : 58] Daniel is a great example for us. He acted here in faith, didn't he? Verse 16, we're told that Daniel goes to...

I've got my references wrong. Slightly later on, he goes and recognizes that he needs to pray to the living God.

He does go to Nebuchadnezzar and he asks Nebuchadnezzar what he wants and why he's doing what he's doing and then he throws himself to God in prayer.

It was the right verse. I was just looking at the wrong chapter. This Daniel went to the king and asked for him so that he might interpret the dream for him. So he gets a hearing.

He goes into the palace. We've seen in chapter one, he's probably gained some respect because of the way he acts and the way he lives and he is able, quite unusually, to get an audience in the presence of the king.

[15 : 01] But when he does so, he recognizes that he's not proud, he's not arrogant. He returns to his house, he explains the matter to his friends and he urges them to plead for mercy for God.

So he's going to the place where he knows the answers need to come. He's going to God. He doesn't presume on God. He doesn't demand of God. He pleads for mercy from God and humbly and fervently he prays to the living God about this situation.

And interestingly, isn't it? He doesn't say, oh God, please help us and give me the interpretation of the dream so that me and Shadrach Mishinak Bednego can be really in charge and all the rest will get vaporized.

No, he doesn't pray for that. He says he prays for them as well so that all the astrologers will be saved. He's got a wide and a broad and a compassionate prayer. He cares for the people that he's been working with.

He doesn't just want to zap them and be in control. He prays an act in faith and caring for them. And of course, as Colin read out, he's given the answer to this great dream that Nebuchadnezzar has.

[16 : 14] It's revealed to him. We know that he's got a gift of interpreting and seeing dreams, but it's revealed to me. There's over 30 revealed type verbs in this chapter.

You know, Daniel, who is in this autobiography, is very keen to make clear that it's God who's revealing this dream to him. It's all of God. He is the revealer of mysteries.

And he reveals this mystery to Daniel, this dream to Daniel. But you know, just as an interesting aside, God's not the revealer of all mysteries. So you might have mystery, and I might have mystery in my life that God isn't promising to reveal.

Verse 22, we were told, you know, he reveals deep and hidden things, but he knows what lies in darkness and light dwells with him. So there's still darkness. There's still things we don't understand.

There's things we don't know, but he knows it's light to him. And that's a great recognition in Daniel's heart and mind of the character of God.

[17 : 18] He's the one who holds the future, and he's a glorious King of Kings. And when he gets this dream interpreted, he doesn't immediately leg it into the palace to tell the King, all excited.

He takes time to stop and to praise God for who God is, to take time to acknowledge that God is the one and to praise God. And he wants that recorded also, that is for the praise and glory of God.

You know, one of the biggest problems in my life is that I pray for things, or I pray in situations of great need and of great darkness, and God helps me through them.

And I'm like one of the nine lepers, I don't come back and give praise and thanks to God. I take it for granted. Of course he's going to do that. Isn't that a terrible thing when Jesus asked, where are the other nine who had been healed?

They hadn't come back. They hadn't taken time to thank him and praise him. Daniel's not like that. So Daniel here speaks into Nebuchadnezzar's life.

[18 : 20] So he goes back to Nebuchadnezzar with the answer to the dream. I'm not going to go through this dream today. You'll be pleased to know it's repeated and well, kind of repeated.

The truths are repeated in chapter seven. So I'm not going to take a long time. I'm not going to take time dismantling and interpreting the dream. It's there for you. But there's this big, amazing, metal idol that Nebuchadnezzar has been dreaming about.

And the truth is that God wants to speak to Nebuchadnezzar. It's Daniel being praying for the king.

We believe so. But God wants to speak to him and he wants to tell him about who is on the throne. He wants to tell him who has given him the power that he has.

He wants to change his foundation and change on whom he's relying. He wants him to stop being fearful and dictatorial at the same time and humbly lead his people who have authority over the Jewish exiles.

[19 : 34] So it's an amazing prophecy that reaches into the future from 600 BC of four different kingdoms. Probably a varying power and a decreasing glory and strength.

We'll see a little bit more about that in chapter seven. There's this great big idol, gold and then different metals to get the feet of iron and clay.

And then a small stone comes along and kind of launches itself at the feet of this idol.

And interestingly, this small stone, which is kind of lesser than all these beautiful different metals, it destroys the idol and it's crushed to just ground.

It's quite similar language to the language Nebuchadnezzar was going to use of the astrologers. If they didn't answer, I'm going to crush you. Your house is going to end up as rubble.

[20 : 41] So it's quite interesting. God uses the same kind of language speaking about the idol. But the interesting thing about this stone crushes all these kingdoms, bring them to the end.

But it's a growing stone. So you've got to imagine that. You've got to use your imagination because none of these metals are living. And stone isn't usually living, but it's a growing stone. It's expanding and it ends up covering the whole earth.

That's what nightmares are like, aren't they? Where things become bigger and bigger and bigger and we can't do anything about them. And Nebuchadnezzar is panicked by this. And the stone that ends up covering the whole universe, the whole world.

And in the interpretation, Daniel from God says that this is the kingdoms of the world. But there's going to be another kingdom that will come. There will be more powerful and more everlasting and more glorious than any of the kings kingdoms that there have been up to now.

Now, lots of writing and lots of things have been said about what these four different stages of kingdoms and idols that relate to part of the idols are. Could well be that, well, Nebuchadnezzar was the head and that was gold.

[21 : 53] Could be that the Medo-Persian kingdom that came next was the next bit. And the Greek kingdom and the Greek power that came after that was the next part.

And indeed the feet of Iron and Clay was the Roman kingdom, the Roman power that was throughout the world at the time of Jesus when stone, which represents Jesus Christ and His kingdom, comes a living stone.

And the New Testament kingdom in the world is often referred to, or Christ is referred to as the living stone. It's a prophecy about the coming of Jesus' kingdom.

It's a prophecy about the coming of the Messiah, we'll look a little bit more tonight about the coming of the Messiah in the minds of the people. This inauspicious small stone that wouldn't have been used in any precious eye making of any idol.

This ordinary stone that nobody looks at becomes powerful, might be references there to the pebbles back in David killing Goliath.

[23 : 10] The thing you would think least would be used to wield power. And you know Christ crucified as a small feeble stone, isn't it? Stumbling block to Jews, foolishness to the rest of us. Christ crucified.

A small and a suspicious stone becomes a stone on which this everlasting kingdom is built. So he speaks into Nebuchadnezzar's life and says, look you need to trust the living God.

You need to stop worshipping idols, you need to stop thinking you are the man because you are in this position. You're only here because I have allowed you into this position.

But do we think the Nebuchadnezzar's listening? Well, I don't think he really is at this point. He does fall prostrate before Daniel and pay him honour.

But I think it's more about relief than about repentance. He's just delighted with the answer and he's delighted with Daniel because he realises all this is going to happen in the future.

[24 : 21] I'm the head of gold and I'm going to carry on being in the position that I'm in. So he's not really repentant and he's not really acknowledging God. He's kind of almost worshipping Daniel here and he's relieved that he's going to be able to carry on the way he's going.

You see, for him and interestingly for all of us really, the problem is not one of evidence. There was plenty of evidence who God was, who knew his mind, who gave him this dream, who was speaking the future.

The problem wasn't evidence, the problem was his heart. So you go out tomorrow with your friends and they say, well I would believe in Jesus if I had more evidence. If I could see him, if I could touch, if I could feel and they want to see him, no God.

But the problem isn't really one of evidence. Jesus was alive when he was alive and many people didn't believe in him because the problem is a heart problem with us. It's a sinful problem. It's a rebellious problem.

So when we don't believe, it's not because there's not evidence. It's not because the Bible isn't true. It isn't because it's clear. It isn't because it's not clear. It's because we choose in our rebellion not to have him lord it over us in our lives.

[25 : 32] We need to be listening to what God says through his word. So in reflection and in conclusion, very briefly, what would a chapter like this say to us in our own lives very briefly?

Well I hope it has already spoken a little bit to us in our lives. Can we remember that this is about God, this passage, this chapter? There's lots of little references to God. He doesn't come blasting in.

There's little references to him all the way through in verse 11. You know, what the King asks is too much. No one can reveal it to the King except the gods.

They do not live among men. Verse 20, the praise and the adoration that Daniel gives. Verse 29, as you were lying there, O King, your mind turned to things to come and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen.

God is the revealer of mysteries. In verse 44, in the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.

[26 : 41] In verse 7, the king said to Daniel, surely your God is the God of gods, the Lord of worlds. So this is a passage that's beginning to open up Nebuchadnezzar's eyes.

I don't think his eyes are opened yet, but he's beginning to see God and I believe God is working through the prayers of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. It's interesting, isn't it, that Daniel goes to them.

He goes to them to pray about a situation. So it points forward to Calvary and his kingdom coming.

So then it was future. For us now, we look back, but we also look forward because his kingdom is still coming.

He is still bringing in people. We're still to make that prayer from the Lord's prayer. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Calvary is the core, the message of Calvary, the death and the resurrection of Jesus is the core of this great everlasting kingdom which is not of this world, which is not bound by geography or by nationality or by sex.

[28 : 01] Male and female, Jew and Gentile, throughout the world belong to this kingdom of God. Nebuchadnezzar was being challenged about his future, is your future secure in that kingdom?

Is Christ your Lord? That is very much what Christ still speaks to us, that our security, our foundation, our belonging, our perspective is safe and secure and strong when it's in the Lord Jesus Christ because we belong then to this great kingdom which will never end.

You know, everything else is kind of sinking sand. Is that where our future is set? Is that where our hope is set? Is that where our perspective and our identity lies?

This indestructible spiritual kingdom, it's tough, it's hard work, but it's also glorious and he provides for us and he loves us and he cares for us.

This kingdom is one that we'll see more about and very unexpectedly we don't kind of dovetail these things but very beautifully tonight is about the birth of Jesus and what that says into the kingdom and what it means for us.

[29 : 20] And lastly in terms of reflecting on a chapter like this which you may think is very kind of irrelevant to you. If you think that of the Old Testament, please reconsider because it's God's story that remains powerful and significant.

Prayer, which I mentioned at the beginning in many ways, prayer opens up his sovereignty. Prayer opens up his sovereignty in our lives. He uses prayer, he acts through prayer, he chooses in his sovereignty to work through the prayers of his people.

Why do we pray he loves to hear us? Why do we pray he commands it? Why do we pray because he chooses to work through our prayers? What a great motivation. The people you see, the people that are around you in life can become kind of embraced in God's will and in God's sovereignty through your prayers.

You can invoke their names into God's action as it were and leave up to him to work in their lives. It gives us the access to the impossible.

When you see your friends who you think they will never believe, they're as hard as stone. They've got no interest whatsoever. That's God's work. The impossibility stuff is all God's. But simply what he asks us to do is to pray about these people and share the truth with them and pray for opportunities to do so.

[30 : 45] He and his sovereign power will do the rest in our lives. It's just set aside that time for praying into God's sovereignty and do it even together.

Isn't that just such a great picture of the way Daniel didn't kind of go blustering on in his own that he went to his three friends and said, Look, we've really got to pray about this. We've really got to ask God's mercy and may that be something that we learn to do together.

We become casual and relaxed and able and natural to ask one another. Come on, let's pray about this situation. Let's ask for God to be involved in it.

Let's bring him into this situation we find ourselves in, in his sovereign power and grace. That's what he chooses to do. Great dignity he gives us in our lives by allowing us to be part of this kingdom and to be allowed, allow us to be part of the working of this kingdom.

Great dignity, great significance, great place to be. Amen. Let's bow our heads briefly and pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that you would teach us from your word, from a passage like Daniel written hundreds of years before Jesus, often sometimes just because it's narrative and it's a long passage, we think, well, what is it speaking into my life and into my situation?

[32 : 08] But it deals with people and as it deals with faith and as it deals with God, we find its relevance and truth growing and significant. But above all, what we do, like Daniel and his friends, we come and plead your mercy.

We plead that you would work through your word, that it would not return to you void, that it would bear fruit, that each of us would dig our roots deep towards the water, the living water which is God and his word is revelation.

And may it feed us, may we be inspired and excited by it and may it teach us of the things of God. We ask in Jesus' precious name, Amen.