

With all the recent history of uprisings and overthrows in the Middle East it is clearer than ever that no nation or ruler lasts forever. In Libya the ruler there was forced out and then killed after 33 years. The ruler of Egypt was forced to step down after 30 years. Then he went into exile and has no real plans to return as leader of Egypt. Throughout history great leaders and really rotten dictators have risen to take power only to see their time of rule last only a relatively short time.

So now imagine a so-called ruler who didn't grow up with any power or lineage to claim as royalty. This ruler wasn't pampered and wasn't wealthy. During the time he should have been making his move and gathering followers he wasn't showing a power play at all. No subjects or loyal soldiers to fight for him. He never really seemed to have any power and then suddenly he was gone. And now what if you heard claims that this ruler was coming back in a triumphant return? You probably wouldn't believe it. The power was all in his head. He didn't have any ability to rule over anybody.

The prophet Daniel received some really incredible visions from the Lord. At the end of one such vision, after seeing dreadful beasts rise up from the earth and destroy, Daniel sees in his vision something completely different. What he sees is the future, his future, and especially our future. The first lesson lets us look into that vision...

**Awaiting the King's triumphant return
Coming on the clouds
Bringing a kingdom that lasts forever**

Daniel's vision was of kingdoms. He saw four different kingdoms ruling the entire world as they knew it. One after the other kingdoms would come, collapse, and the next would take its place for 500 years. People got used to kings making extravagant promises to have a kingdom last forever and be all powerful. But each one lost their kingdom and never returned. Think of a president today. At most that lasts eight years. Seems like a long time and a lot of claims can be made. But their time is so short in reality they often can't make good on all their promises. And once they leave office, that's it. They don't and can't return. No triumphant returns for them.

Speaking to Pontius Pilate at his trial in the gospel, Jesus was really making promises. **"My kingdom is not of this world. But now my kingdom is from another place. You are right in saying I am a king."** His promises were almost laughed off. **"What is truth?"** Those promises still aren't taken that seriously today. Jesus seems like many other religious figures, making promises but then not backing them up. Who would believe his promise to return triumphantly? **"At that time...they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory."** The more years go by, the less serious people take it. Are you one of them? Are you taking Jesus' return seriously? Is it harder with what goes on in your life? It's easier to think about Christmas shopping, or cyber Monday deals. There are December scheduling nightmares that need to be worked out. There are trips to plan, parties to prepare for, and football games to watch. Nothing sinful, but when it becomes so important it makes thinking about Jesus' return seem not important, the Bible says we've got a problem. Not taking Jesus' return seriously or not believing in it at all is trouble for our souls.

Daniel's vision couldn't be clearer. **"There before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven."** This figure was new to Daniel's vision. Before this it had only been terrible beasts rising from the earth. A lion with eagles' wings that had those wings ripped off and it stood up on two feet like a human. A vicious bear with three ribs between its teeth. A leopard with four wings and four heads. And the last beast was the worst. Large iron teeth crushing and devouring victims and huge feet to trample whatever was left. It also had ten horns. So the Son of Man figure is striking. Instead of coming up from the earth like all the beasts, this son of man comes on the clouds.

This heavenly figure, the Son of Man, is led to the presence of God. It's his coming on the clouds and his title as Son of Man that give us clues as to who this great king is. Jesus said about himself, **"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."** Again he said, **"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."** And lastly, **"I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."** Jesus referred to himself using the title Son of Man. Daniel's vision is of Jesus, the Son of Man, coming on the clouds.

But why? This Son of Man does what we can't. He approaches the Ancient of Days without fear. Our sins keep us from approaching God. Jesus has no sins. But he didn't approach God for nothing. Jesus was king but came from heaven, first not on clouds but born like all the rest of us. He lived here, he died here, all for us. He gave up his rule as King and Son of Man to become man. He came here so that we would take him seriously. He paid for all those times we lost focus and let something else take God's place in our heart. Jesus offered himself for our souls to save us from sin. And now we're awaiting this King's triumphant return coming on the clouds in glory.

A ruler in exile loses all their former power. Look at pictures of the captured Saddam Hussein. He was a ruler who had lost all control and power. When the soldiers captured him he was simply running and hiding. While Jesus was on this earth he didn't look like any powerful ruler at all. At his crucifixion and his burial any power he had was gone, stripped away from him by the authorities that put him to death. This King's kingdom had been stripped away and was gone forever. So it looked. But remember we're waiting for the King's triumphant return and when he returns he's bringing a kingdom that will last forever.

Daniel saw in his vision the Son of Man approach the Ancient of Days. Once in his presence God gave to the Son of Man. **"He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him."** So absolute is his authority that no one on the earth is able to resist worshipping this king. More than any earthly empire can make happen, this king has the attention and the obedience of all people. This final scene has yet to play out. But Daniel's vision tells us it's still coming.

It's easy to question the power and absolute authority. How could someone dying so cruelly and being buried so finally have any absolute authority? How can some not physically here have any absolute authority? And things seem to keep getting worse. Less and less people seem inclined to listen to Jesus or listen to us about Jesus. The gospel doesn't seem to work. Organized religion gets a bad reputation for trusting in someone who doesn't seem to have any kind of power. We get laughed at and made fun of and so we hide our faith. We figure Sunday morning is enough but we cover our bases with a healthy savings account and we don't invest too heavily in church just in case. We largely live how we want to live because Jesus doesn't seem to care. He's letting everything go unpunished.

Every ruler, king, dictator, nation, kingdom, or empire from history has lost it eventually. They all get taken over by the next big country or empire. All except one. **"His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."** Jesus' kingdom you can count on. His kingdom and his reign is one you don't have to be afraid of. In fact his kingdom is for you. It's a kingdom with you in mind. You're called by his glorious and gracious kingdom. You're put under his rule, which is always graciously turned for your benefit. Once under his rule you're free. Free of sins, free of fear, and free to serve and worship him. This king conquers you through grace in a loving message from his Word. He captures you through simple water and basic bread and wine. Now we wait for his triumphant return bringing a kingdom that lasts forever.

You pictured a king with no great past, no glorious present, and a future with no power and no authority. Not a great king. But that's not the King you have. Yours is a King who made amazing promises to you. A King who promised a glorious return coming on clouds. When you see him, and you will see him, look up because heaven is a reality. He's also a King coming with a kingdom that will last forever, guaranteeing never ending perfection for you in heaven. He is your King, Christ the King, and we await his triumphant return.