

The Triumph of Good Over Evil Daniel 7:15-28

Introduction

I saw an interesting Marvel trailer early in May that I thought was brilliant, timely, and emotional. It was brilliant because it was released at a time when we were just about all fed up with COVID and everything else that was negative in our world. The trailer was timely because even the powers to be in Marvel studios could see how a year of sheltering in place can have serious and adverse effects on us emotionally and spiritually. The trailer was emotional because it reminds us of a longing for something greater, deep in the core of our being (show video)¹.

In his article, “The Four Elements of Every Successful Story”, Robert Dickman believes that there are four elements that must be present if a story is to stand the test of time. He defines story as, “a fact wrapped in an emotion that can compel us to take action and so transform the world around us.”² This does not mean that stories are inherently fiction; it just means that anything worth telling should be told with feeling. Consider the four elements Dickman believes must be included in all great stories:

1. Passion. Does the story contain sufficient passion to engage the emotions of its target audience? Are the stakes high enough? The emotions of a story act as its primary anchor in memory and its motivation to actions.
2. Hero. Does the story provide a clearly defined point of view? Can the facts that lie at its core be understood? Can this point of view be comfortably accepted by the target audience?
3. Antagonist. Are the obstacles that confront the hero of the story (and by extension, the audience) expressed clearly so that the actions needed to overcome those obstacles are understood and the challenge of taking such actions fully accepted?
4. Transformation. Does the story have the power to change the life of the audience in a meaningful way, and is that transformation positive?

Story is a part of the DNA of every single human being. The reason why we love to both tell and hear stories is because we live in one. In our story there is passion. We all are under a curse where not only must we contend with our own brokenness and sin, but a place where there are great beasts who mean us harm. In our story, the stakes could never be higher.

¹ See the following link for “Marvel Studios Celebrates the Movies”:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdpxoFcdORI>

² Robert Dickman. “*The Four Elements of Every Successful Story.*” Reflections, Vol. 4 (The Society for Organizational Learning and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003): 51-56.

In our story there is an antagonist who is real. He is moving in the shadows as he influences kingdoms and demonic powers. He is not above the Ancient of Days and nor is he able to operate his schemes apart from his sovereign will. But the great antagonist hates humanity for we are the only creature in all of creation that bears the image of God. Our antagonist is the Devil, and Jesus said of him that he, **“was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies”** (John 8:44).

In our story there is a hero who was promised long ago to deliver us from all that is evil, who will reverse the curse of sin, make us whole, and to establish a peace in this world that we all long for. That hero is the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13-14, that hero is Jesus of Nazareth who is the Christ (messiah). His story is the good news that has changed millions of lives as his redemptive power has the power to transform even the vilest of persons.

In Daniel 7 are included all the elements that are included in every good story. Daniel 7 is history that is about the past, the present, and the future.

Antichrists Have Come and are Coming

In Daniel’s dream were four beasts that emerged from the sea. The first beast, a lion with eagles wings, represented Babylon (626-539 BC). The second beast that was like a bear represented the Medo-Persian Empire (539-330 BC). The third beast, a leopard with four wings and four heads, represented the empire of Greece under Alexander the Great (330-63); like the leopard, Greece was fast moving (unlike the other three beasts), powerful, and extremely dangerous. The four heads on the leopard, I believe represent the four generals who essentially divided Greece into four parts sometime after Alexander the Great died (Greece and Macedonia, Asia Minor, Much of the Middle East, and Egypt and part of Palestine).

As terrifying as the first three beasts were for Daniel, it was the fourth beast that received the most attention, for it was unlike the other beasts in that it was **“terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong”** (v. 7). This beast had iron teeth, ten horns, and represented the Roman empire that was still about 500 years in Daniel’s future. As I stated last week, the fourth beast is Rome, but I also believe it is more. The ten horns represent ten kings (v. 24) who may be a reference to the 10 major Caesars of Rome (there were 12 Caesars, but two only served for a very short time), the horns could also be symbolic of the power of Rome, or it could be both. The point of the horns is that there are multiple of them.

Of the ten horns, the first three were plucked out and a smaller horn rose in their place that had, **“eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things”** (v. 8). I am not sure if this smaller horn will be like the first three Caesars such as Julius Caesar (a renowned general, politician, and scholar), Augustus (transformed Rome from a republic to an empire, brought prosperity to the empire, and transformed the culture of Rome), and Tiberius (who grew the imperial treasury of Rome). Maybe the little horn will exhibit the best of all the Roman Caesars, but what we do know about this king is that Daniel said he seemed greater than the other horns.

What we are told about the little horn is that he made war against and prevailed over the saints (v. 21), he will speak against the Most High, wear out the saints, and change the times and the

law (v. 25). So who is this horn that will rule over a kingdom Daniel describes as different from all the rest of the kingdoms and exceedingly terrifying? In Revelation 13 we are given a fuller description of this same beast whose authority came from the Devil and who will be marveled by the world (vv. 1-14):

And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. If anyone has an ear, let him hear: If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints. (Revelation 13:5–10)

I believe that Daniel 7 is the first reference to the Antichrist who is coming and warned about in 2 Thessalonians 2 as, **“the man of lawlessness... the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship... proclaiming himself to be God”** (vv. 1-12). There have been others throughout human history who have been identified with the little horn for good reason. There are three who come to mind. First there was Antiochus IV Epiphanes who invaded Jerusalem in 168 BC, marched into the Jewish Temple and erected a statue of Zeus, then sacrificed a pig on the altar of incense. The second king that comes to mind is Titus who besieged Jerusalem just before Passover and within five months killed over a million Jews and destroyed the Jewish Temple. The third person that comes to mind is Adolf Hitler. I believe all three of these men were a type of antichrist who exhibited the worst of the little horn. I also believe there will be others like these men who will come just as the apostle John warned us of: **“Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist have come, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour”** (1 John 2:18). What qualifies someone as being an antichrist? We are told in the Bible that an antichrist is anyone who **“denies the Father and the Son”** (1 John 2:22).

Regarding the coming antichrist, one theologian wrote of Daniel 7, “Antichrists and ‘the antichrist’ blaspheme God, persecute God’s people, and are lawbreakers and disrupters of God’s good design. They deify themselves and turn the social order into godless chaos. This reaches a climax when the ‘beast coming up out of the sea’ in Revelation 13 emerges. He has and has had many forerunners, but he will top them all.³ There is an antichrist who is coming who I believe is yet in the future and will be a king empowered by Satan who will exercise great power and authority. The antichrist who is to come will speak words against the Most High, and he will pursue and harm those who follow Jesus (the Son of Man) and worship the Ancient of Days (see vv. 9-10). We are told that he will be given limited time to do this for, **“a time, times, and half a time”** (v. 25b); in Revelation 13:5 we are told that this time period will be forty-two months. The point of Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 13:5 is that the antichrist’s reign of terror will be limited because the Son of Man will come to bring retribution on the Dragon (Satan), the little horn (the antichrist), the Beast (the godless kingdom the antichrist will rule), and the whore of Babylon.

³ Daniel Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Daniel* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference: 2017), p. 93.

Christ Will Conquer and Transform

Remember, the point of Daniel 7 is not the scary beasts, but the Ancient of Days who sovereignly reigns and the Son of Man who is given, **“dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him”** (v. 14a). Unlike the ten horned kingdom and those that preceded it, the Kingdom handed over to the Son of Man will be, **“an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed”** (v. 14b). The Son of Man is none other than Jesus the Christ. The word “Christ” means Messiah or deliverer. In other words, all protagonists in every great story are only the echoes of the great protagonists.

The first enemy Jesus defeated was sin, so He had to die in our place as a ransom for our sins. He died to make broken people whole, so on the cross He was, **“pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed”** (Isa. 53:5). The second enemy Jesus conquered was death. After Jesus died, He was buried and remained in the Tomb for three days; on the third day, he rose. Jesus’ resurrection validated all that He did and claimed to be when He miraculously walked out of the tomb. On that day, the Bible declares **“Death was swallowed up in victory”** (1 Cor. 15:54b). Because He rose, we need not fear death because, for the Christian, the grave has no victory over us.... This is the Gospel... the great story that continues to transform lives forever.

This is not the end of our story and our need for Jesus, the great Protagonists, will deliver and restore what we were born to experience. We are told in Daniel 7:26, that on that day, **“the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end.”** Jesus promised what will happen once the power of the beast and the antichrist is stripped from them: **“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”** (Matthew 24:29–30).

In Revelation 19, we are told that Jesus will come on a white horse as an already victorious general because none will be able to oppose him or resist him. Remember that the terrifying beast only has ten horns, but note how Jesus is described when he comes to crush Satan indefinitely:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.
(Revelation 19:11–15)

I said that included in Daniel 7 are all the elements of a great story. Verse 27 is our happily ever after that can only come after Jesus comes. When Jesus comes again, he will do so to give his people the Kingdom that is imperishable, unfading, and kept at this moment in heaven for us (see 1 Peter 1:3-5). Listen to our happily ever after in Daniel 7:27, **“And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him”** (Daniel 7:27).

My dear brothers and sisters, if the Ancient of Days is for you, who can be against you? If the Son of Man is your deliverer and savior, then even if the kingdoms of this world and Babylon brings their worst, they ultimately have no power over you because your citizenship rests in the hands of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Amen.