WHO GETS THE LAST WORD?

1. Not worldly kings or power
2. But Christ the King

Having the last word matters, doesn’t it? Being able to pound your chest and taunt your opponent after taking a 7-0 lead in the first quarter does not matter anywhere near as much as being able to simply point to the scoreboard at the end of the game and show that you have won the game. That is called having the last word, and maybe it even shows that you were in control all along, even when it did not look like it in the first quarter.

In our reading this morning Daniel talks about getting the last word. He explains who, when everything has been said and done and everyone has had their say, gets the last word. He shows who was really in control all along.

The opening verses of chapter 7 of Daniel introduce a vision which God sent to Daniel. In this vision Daniel sees four beasts arise - one that was both like a lion and an eagle, one that looked like a bear, one that looked like a leopard, and one that was more frightening than the other three, one that had 10 horns.

Although Daniel did not specifically name all four kingdoms here, we know that the first one, the winged lion, refers to the Babylonian kingdom. In fact, archeologists have found much evidence that this creature was used by the Babylonians as a symbol of their kingdom's power.

But in Daniel's vision, the beast's wings, which had enabled it to move so rapidly, were torn off and a second beast, which looked like a bear, took over. This beast represents the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians, which defeated the Babylonians. It seemed as though the Medes and the Persians had had the last word. The beast was even told to get up and eat its fill of flesh. It certainly did so, as the Medo-Persian empire subdued many kingdoms.

But then Daniel saw a third beast that looked like a leopard. Daniel says that this beast, commonly understood to represent the Greek empire of Alexander the Great, was given authority to rule. Now who had the last word? Not the Medes and the Persians!

Then the fourth beast appeared, crushing and devouring its victims and trampling underfoot whatever was left. This beast has been commonly understood to refer to the Roman Empire, a fearsome machine that efficiently conquered all in its way.

Finally, out of the fourth empire Daniel sees a tiny horn sprouting. But this horn grows in influence, uprooting three other horns and speaking boastfully. This horn is commonly understood to be the Antichrist which is spoken of elsewhere in the Bible.

But then look at what Daniel sees: Thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days was seated. His clothes were white as snow, and the hair on his head was like pure wool. His throne was flames of fire. Its wheels were burning fire. A river of fire flowed out from his presence. Thousands upon thousands served him, Ten-thousand times ten-thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and books were opened.

Now someone is finally going to have the last word and that someone is the Ancient of Days. That someone is God.

The term the Ancient of Days already makes clear the difference between the kingdoms of this world and God. God is eternal; all the power structures of this world are not. God is unchangeable; all human power structures are changeable, and so are inherently unstable. God was here before any kingdoms of the world and he will be here long after the kingdoms of the world have left the scene.

While all the kingdoms of the world were taking their place in the spotlight and beating their chests and shouting that they were king of the mountain, God was waiting to have the last word. In fact, as we see in our reading, God was actually in charge all along. The second kingdom was told - permitted, really - by someone to get up and eat its fill of flesh. That someone was God.
third kingdom was **given authority** to rule. Now we know that authority can only be given by one who is in charge. In the case of Alexander the Great and his march through the known world of that time, God was in charge. Keep all that in mind, we will come back to it in a bit. For now, we return to Daniel’s vision.

Daniel says that **the court was seated and books were opened**. Now it was time for the final judgment, for the last word. The beast that had sprung from the horn was thrown into the blazing fire, thrown into hell. The other beasts had been stripped of their authority long ago, even before the final judgment, even before the last word, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans had ceased to have any real power on the world scene.

What are these books that were opened? There are two books that are spoken on symbolically in the Bible. One is the Book of Life – the family register of God in which is written all the names of those who belong to him. The other book that is mentioned is the book in which deeds are recorded according to which God will judge people. What an awesome moment that will be!

But that could very well be a fearsome moment for us as well. We might have good reason to long for the fearsomeness of the Babylonians or the Persians or the Soviet Union or the worst government we can imagine. After all, such powers were/are only capable of destroying our bodies, whereas when we look at Daniel’s vision of the Almighty, the holy God, and when we see the throne of fire and the river of fire flowing out, we realize that he who has the last word is also capable of destroying our souls.

Worse yet, he has every reason to do so, sinful as we are. We have fallen prey to nearly every temptation that those awful Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans fell into. But instead of having an earthly kingdom snatched from us, our sins should cause us to be denied an eternal kingdom and be forced to live under God’s unending wrath in hell, forever hearing him speak the last and final words of judgment.

But take a closer look and see who actually gets the last word. God had not given the last word to any of the world powers, choosing instead to take it away from each and every one of them.

And yet we also see him giving that power to someone else. Daniel says: **I kept watching the night visions, and there, in the clouds of heaven, I saw one like a son of man coming. He came to the Ancient of Days, and he was brought before him. To him was given dominion, honor, and a kingdom. All peoples, nations, and languages will worship him. His dominion is an eternal dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.**

This vision refers to Jesus and there are a number of important things to notice about it. First, note that he approaches the Ancient of Days and is actually led into his presence! How can he dare to approach a holy, eternal God and how can he actually be accepted, how can he be led into the presence of God and even given dominion, honor, and a kingdom?

We would have to fear that throne of fire, that river of fire, that holy God. We would tremble at the thought of entering his presence. But Jesus does not. He knows that he will be led into God’s presence because he himself is holy. He has done everything God wanted.

But we have not and so we all have reason to fear that moment when the books are opened. But Jesus has nothing to fear because those books will reveal a perfect life and a perfect suffering and death. Those books will reveal a perfect record of holiness.

And because Jesus is holy, God gives him authority, glory, and sovereign power. God gives him authority to rule - all authority. There are no limits on Jesus’ power. We read that **his dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.** Jesus is King forever. Truly, he is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

The New Testament assures us that Jesus will have the last word, telling us that Jesus will be given the authority to judge. And when we see Jesus as judge, we are not frightened. Awed,
yes, but not frightened. Because we know that not only will we get a fair trial, but we know that we will not even be charged with any crimes.

As Paul says in Romans: **Who will bring an accusation against God's elect? God is the one who justifies! Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus, who died and, more than that, was raised to life, is the one who is at God's right hand and who is also interceding for us!**

Sure, there will be a righteous, holy, almighty God sitting on the throne of judgment that day. But he will ask Jesus for his verdict. When we approach that judgment seat, Jesus will say: **These people are not guilty. They are righteous and holy. Their sins are covered, taken away by my blood.** Truly, Jesus will rule.

We can take great comfort in that as we look to the future. But we can also take great comfort in that right now, for he is already in charge of all things, just as he was in charge of the Greeks and the Romans thousands of years ago.

That is something we tend to forget. The Psalmist tells us: **It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in people.** Now, we trust God's promises to take care of us. We know nothing is impossible for him. We know that he will protect us.

We believe all this sincerely, or so we say. Then reality reveals our hypocrisy. How many lost sleep or stressed out with recent election? Maybe we feared that the leaders we elected were not the best choice for our nation and family. The point is not who is best for our nation. That is a personal decision we can disagree on. The point is - where are we placing our trust?

The night of the election, our Lord did not give up his control of the universe. He did not stop loving us or take back his promise to protect us. So why did we worry and fret? It is because we trusted people more than God. We have acted as if people are stronger than God!

God made an unbreakable, unconditional promise to us. He is our refuge, our protection. If I lose my job, if I get sick, if I am on my deathbed, the Lord will be my refuge. He will give me strength. He will fill my heart with peace. No one else can do that!

No matter if the next years are great or difficult, no matter who is in charge of the country, the Lord is in charge of my world and my life. He is and always will be my refuge. This is a promise we can count on! You see, Jesus gets the last word.

So do not get caught up in fear and do not be overwhelmed by the words of those who appear now to have power - whether power in government, power of influence in culture or power of brute strength. Do not even quaver with fear at the fearsome and accusatory words of the devil concerning your sins. They are not the last words and therefore they are not words that will last.

Here are some last words for you from Daniel, just a few verses after our text: **The saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever - yes, for ever and ever.** The last words of this sermon are also the last words of the Bible and they are words of glorious and lasting certainty: **The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.**

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