

Silent Night

by Jeff Strite

Daniel 9:24-9:27

Open: I'm told that, in the early 1800's, there was a priest in Europe who led his congregation in a Christmas Eve service. Unfortunately, the organ had broken down and many of the traditional Christmas songs could not be sung. But, sometime before he had written a song of his own and, playing his guitar, he shared it that night with his church. Sing it with me now:

"Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin Mother and Child, Holy Infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night, wondrous star, lend thy light;
With the angels let us sing, ALLELUIA TO OUR KING.
Christ the Saviour is born, Christ the Saviour is born.

Silent night, holy night, Son of God, love's pure light,
Radiant beams from Thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace,
JESUS, LORD AT THY BIRTH; Jesus, Lord at Thy birth."

Now, isn't that a beautiful song? There's something about the song that seems to touch the very soul. Even after nearly 200 years the song still has the ability to sooth our hearts.

I chose the 3 verses we sang for a special reason.
The 1st verse ... because we know it so well.
But 2nd verse declares "Alleluia to our KING"
And the 3rd verse says "Jesus, LORD at Thy birth."

This is the very heart of the message of Christmas.
Jesus came to be our King.
He was born to be our Lord.

Like I said, "Silent Night" is a powerful song. It still has the power to touch the hearts of men.

How many of you have heard of a Country singer named Travis Tritt?
Before he became famous Travis Tritt spent years playing in bars, and some of them were downright seedy establishments. He said that many of these bars were dangerous places, with drunk fans starting fights over the smallest matters. But Tritt discovered a unique way to stop the fights.
He said, "'Silent Night' proved to be my all-time lifesaver. Just when [bar fights]

started getting out of hand, when bikers were reaching for their pool cues & rednecks were heading for the gun rack, I'd start playing 'Silent Night.' It could be the middle of July -- I didn't care. Sometimes they'd even start crying, standing there watching me sweat and play..."

["Twang! The Ultimate Book of Country Music Quotations," compiled by Raymond Obstfeld and Sheila Burgener (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1997), 47.]

Now, why would "Silent Night" have this kind of power?

Why did the very singing of that song bring peace to even drunks about to have a fight in a bar?

Well, it brought peace to the hearts of these men because it speaks of a God who cared for us. It speaks of hope through a coming King who would be Lord of all.

Now, that brings us to our text this morning.

Through His prophets God spoke of this King of Kings and Lord of Lords who would come to change our lives. And one of the most prominent of those prophets was Daniel. But Daniel was a little different than other Old Testament prophets when it came to the Messiah. Whereas, the other Old Testament prophets told of WHO the Messiah was, or WHERE He was to be born, or HOW He would live and die - Daniel spoke more of WHEN the Messiah would come.

I call Daniel the "Calendar Prophet" because God used Daniel to set up a Calendar or Time-table of when Jesus would come.

When we think of Daniel, we often think of the story of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, or the "Handwriting on the wall" story in chapter 5, or the story of "Daniel and the Lion's Den" but the most powerful messages in Daniel's book had to do with prophecies about Christ and His coming Kingdom - the Church.

But in Daniel, God gave us 3 separate, powerful announcements of WHEN Jesus was to come. The first two prophecies spoke in broad terms describing the kingdoms that would rise and fall before Jesus was born. And the 3rd prophecy (the prophecy of the 70 weeks) spoke with uncanny precision about when the Messiah - Jesus - would begin and complete His earthly ministry.

(SEE FOOTNOTE AT END OF SERMON)

ILLUS: Just to give you a way to visualize how impressive these prophecies were, I want to give you an example of how it would work if I were a prophet making those same kinds of predictions. (I stepped down from the pulpit and sat beside a young couple who have several kids who I knew would not be too embarrassed). I'm going to pick on Roy and Sherri this morning. If I were a prophet I could come sit with them and tell them I had a vision about their boy Eddie.

And I'd say – "Eddie is going to get married one of these days and he and his wife are going to have baby boy. That baby boy is going to grow up and have black hair and stand 6 feet tall. When that boy grows up, he's going to get married and they're going to have a baby boy. And that boy is going to have red hair and will stand 5 feet 10 inches tall. That boy will grow up and get married and they'll have a baby boy... and when that baby boy grows up he's going to become the President of the United States.

And from Eddie's marriage until your great, great grandson becomes president will be EXACTLY 75 years. And I've got all this written down so your family will know this was God's plan for you."

Now wouldn't that be cool if I could tell them all that and be right?

Of course, I can't. I'm not a prophet.

But Daniel was... and that's exactly the type of thing Daniel was led to prophecy about the coming Messiah.

Now, like I said, the first two prophecies were broad and expansive in their scope. They both spoke of four kingdoms that would rise and fall before the coming of the Christ. Those four kingdom were Babylon (of which King Nebuchadnezzar was head). And that nation would fall to the Medes and Persians. In turn that nation would fall to Greeks under Alexander the Great. And that Kingdom would eventually fall to power of Rome.

The first of those two prophecies involved a dream that God had given Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon. The dream deeply troubled the King and he summoned his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers and told them they must tell him the dream and then it's interpretation. Of course they couldn't do that... but Daniel could. And in Daniel chapter 2, Daniel tells the king what the dream was. The king had seen an odd statue:

(At this point we showed a graphic of the statue:

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/86694361549460291/>)

The statue had a HEAD of Gold – Babylon.

The CHEST and ARMS were of SILVER – the Medes and Persians.

The MID-SECTION and THIGHS were of BRONZE – representing the power of Greece.

And the LEGS of IRON and its FEET of Iron and Clay – the merciless might of Rome.

Daniel explained that the HEAD was Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian Kingdom. After their nation fell, God would raise up 3 more different kingdoms represented by the different sections of the statue. And during the reign of that last Kingdom (Rome) this is what would happen:

"As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. But the stone that struck the

image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." Daniel 2:34-35

A few verses later, Daniel explained about this stone that became a mountain: "in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever." Daniel 2:44

Well, the four parts of the Statue can be understood. But what could that STONE possibly represent? (Jesus)

In 1 Peter 2:4 Peter described Jesus as "...the living STONE— rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him".

A few verses later in 1 Peter 2:8 Peter called Jesus "A STONE that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. They stumble because they disobey the message— which is also what they were destined for."

Jesus was the stone that would cause the statue to crumble. He would make men stumble and fall before Him.

But we're also told that His Kingdom would grow into a great mountain that would fill the whole earth. What is Christ's Kingdom? Well - we are.

Colossians 1:13 says "(God) has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into THE KINGDOM OF THE SON he loves"

Once we became Christians we became part of that Kingdom that was to fill the whole earth. Jesus is our King and we are His people... and the very gates of Hell will not stand against us.

That was the first of 3 MAJOR prophecies about the Messiah in Daniel.

The 2nd prophecy came about in a vision Daniel had and in that vision he saw 4 beasts.

(http://amazingdiscoveries.org/268#_)

And these 4 beasts represented the very same kingdoms the statue pointed to: Babylon, the Medes & Persians, Greece, and Rome. Then Daniel wrote:

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man (who do you think that was? That's right, Jesus), 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 peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." Daniel 7:13-14

Again, we're given a picture of Jesus after these 4 great kingdoms rise - one after

the other. The Messiah would arise during the time of that 4th great Kingdom, and HE would be given a Kingdom that would never be destroyed. That kingdom began on the day of Pentecost and has lasted up through our day and age... and it will continue when we Jesus comes again to collect His bride. Jesus is our King. And He will be our King into eternity. His Kingdom will not pass away.

Now that brings us to our text for this morning. In Daniel 9 is the 3rd of the great prophecies which tell WHEN the Messiah was to come. But this prophecy is different than the other two. This vision sets a specific time-table for His coming.

This is called the 70 weeks prophecy.

"Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy." Daniel 9:24

God likes that number "7" and see Him use it a lot throughout Scripture. Many scholars believe 7 is the number FOR God. And, if that's so, He's using the number to drive home the fact that when the Messiah comes He will be Immanuel – OR God with us.

Most commentators will tell you that each of those "sevens" is a group of 7 years. So 70 sevens would be 490 years. And God is declaring – that when that 490 years was over

- He will finish transgression.

Has that happened yet? Yes. When did that happen? At the cross.

- He will put an end to sin.

Has that happened yet? Yes. When did that happen? At the cross.

- He will atone for wickedness

Has that happened yet? Yes. When did that happen? At the cross.

- He will bring in everlasting righteousness.

A couple weeks ago we noted that one of the names for Jesus was "Our righteousness. Our righteousness would never get us into heaven... but when Jesus became our righteousness at the cross – His righteousness would cover our unrighteousness.

- Seal up vision and prophecy.

When Jesus died and rose from the grave He fulfilled all the prophecies about Him in the Old Testament.

- And anoint the most holy.

What is the "most Holy"? It could be Jesus... or it could be us. Part of the reason Jesus came was to establish His church of which we are a part. He made His church "holy" (set it apart).

When Jesus died on the cross for our sins. God declared that was the time that the

Messiah would put an end to the tyranny of sin and fulfill all righteousness for us.

And this was all on a time-table. Notice on your inserts on page 1.

(<http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/books/qod/diag70weeks.htm>)

You see where the time line begins with Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes? King Artaxerxes issued the decree to rebuild the fallen walls of Jerusalem. Daniel 9:25 tells us it was that decree that started the clock ticking for the coming of the Messiah:

“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ (49 years to rebuild the city) and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ (434 years – time of silence) It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.”

Note on that graph when the 70th week began.

When does it say?

27 A.D.

What happened on 27 A.D.

Well, turn your insert over and you’ll see a similar graph with images on it.

(<http://reigninglife.blogspot.com/2015/06/the-daniel-70-weeks-prophecy-was-about.html>)

What does it show happening at 27 A.D.?

That’s right – that was when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. According to Luke 3:23, that’s when Jesus’ ministry began.

Three and a half years later... Jesus dies on the cross. And 3 ½ years after that the Gentiles are welcomed into the Church.

At the end of the 70th week, Jesus had finished transgression, to put an end to sin, atoned for wickedness, brought in everlasting righteousness, sealed up vision and prophecy and anointed the most holy.

At the end of that 70th week, all that Jesus had come to establish had been put in place – His death, burial, and resurrection; and the establishment of His church – a church made up, not just of Jews but also opened to the rest of the world.

Now, there’s more in this prophecy that we could examine, but that would take away from the main focus of these 3 main prophecies given in Daniel – the main focus of each of these prophecies was to predict WHEN the Jesus would come to die for our sins and set up His Kingdom the Church.

In Isaiah 46:11 God declared: “What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.” And that is particularly evident in the prophecies He gave us in Daniel. No other religious leader that has ever lived has had such a powerful witness and testimony as Jesus had.

The accuracy and detail of these prophecies is so powerful that for awhile there were skeptics in the "higher criticism" crowd that maintained that for several years anti-Christian scholars tried to maintain the book of Daniel MUST have been written decades AFTER Jesus rose from the dead.

Of course, the fact that the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament) - both known to have existed about 300 years before Christ - both included the book of Daniel pretty much silenced those critics

Daniel prophecies were God's way of telling the world:

"You can't touch this! And I dare you to ignore it!"

CLOSE: It's because of the astonishing accuracy of prophecies like these from Daniel that we can believe that God's Word and God's promises are trustworthy. But we need to remember that Jesus didn't come just to fulfill prophecies. He came to change the lives and destinies of mankind.

ILLUS: I want to close with the story of how Jesus changed the life of a man named Joseph Mohr. Joseph was an illegitimate child born in Salzburg, Austria in 1792. Salzburg was a very rigidly moral city about these matters of illegitimacy and Joseph's mothers had been ordered to pay a fine for her fatherless child. But she was a knitter who earned little for her work. It would have taken her a full year's wage to pay the penalty.

The town's brutal executioner stepped and offered to pay the fine if he was allowed to become the child's godfather. He hoped by doing this to improve his own reputation. But that bargain ruined Joseph's reputation: as the godson of the feared and hated executioner Joseph was banned from attending school or learning a trade, or even from holding a job.

But the one thing Joseph could do was sing. And he loved to sing. He sang just about everywhere he went. While playing on steps of a monastery, he was overheard singing by a monk who the choirmaster for the cathedral. The monk thought the boy's voice so good, he could not bear to see it wasted and so he found Joseph's mother and arranged for the boy to study with his elite group of students. Joseph was an outstanding pupil and mastered the organ, violin and guitar by the time he was 12.

His training continued and he was ordained a priest in 1815. In one of the churches he served, the organ broke down just days before Christmas Eve in 1818 and Joseph got out his guitar and sang a song he'd created some time before.

(http://www.christianity.com/ChurchHistory/11630322/?utm_source=This%20Week%20in%20Christian%20History%20-%20Christianity.com&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=12/16/2011/)

It was a song by a man who'd been born illegitimate, without hope and without promise of a future - a song he wrote to glorify the Jesus who'd changed his life. Sing it again with me:

"Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin Mother and Child, Holy Infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace."

INVITATION

Footnote: When dealing with these three visions in Daniel, many prophetic teachers put a "gap" of 100s of years at the end of each vision. With the vision of the Nebuchadnezzar's statue in Daniel 6 they put the gap between the legs and feet of the statue. In the vision of the beasts in Daniel 7 these teachers put a gap between the neck and head of the last beast (or perhaps between the head and its horns). And again in Daniel's vision of the 70 sevens in chapter 9 they put a gap between the first 69 weeks of years and the last week.

I reject these "gaps" for two reasons:

1st the gaps aren't in Daniel's visions. They are superimposed by prophetic teachers who see linkage of the terminology of Daniel's prophecies and the language used in New Testament prophecies in Revelation. Because the terminology is similar (they reason) both Revelation and Daniel must be referring to the same events. But the visions in Daniel won't fit into their timetables UNLESS the gaps are inserted.

Thus the gaps are man's inventions, they are not taught in Daniel. And the fact that those non-existent gaps are 100s of years make it more obvious how absurd this concept is.

2nd the gap theory robs Daniel's visions of the primary focus of Old Testament prophecy: the FIRST coming of Christ. Modern day prophetic teachers gloss over Christ's first coming and make these major prophecies all about His 2nd coming. Thus they rob these prophecies of their power to encourage us in how detailed God's plans were for Jesus' ministry and death on the cross.