

Daniel 7:9-10

Dear Friends in Christ,

Most of you probably remember watching news conferences during the gulf wars as one of the generals showed what some of our weapons are capable of doing. They showed us cruise missiles being launched. They showed us smart bombs and bunker buster bombs and how they could be targeted almost within inches of any spot on earth. Lately we have heard a lot about drones and maybe you have even seen some video of one in action. Maybe you have seen or read about a new weapon that emits sound waves that incapacitate those it is aimed at. Our military has some powerful weapons. They are weapons that are awesome if you have them; if they are used for your protection. But they are weapons that are terrifying if you don't have them; if they are used against you.

That's a good way to describe the vision that Daniel saw. He saw God, the Ancient of Days, sitting on a throne of blazing fire with a river of fire flowing out before him. Both Moses and the writer to the Hebrews summarize this vision well when they remind us that **our God is a consuming fire**. Daniel sees this God who is a consuming fire about to be seated as Judge of all people of all time. It seems that this would be an absolutely terrifying thing for anyone to see; and it is terrifying for all who boast against God. But Daniel was given this vision to give comfort to all those who boast about God.

Earlier in this vision Daniel saw one beast after another coming out of a churning sea. He is told that each of these beasts represent a powerful kingdom. They are ferocious and wreak havoc on the earth, but their kingdoms don't last. One beast is replaced by another. How true his vision is! Since Daniel's day think of how many great and powerful kingdoms have come and gone, and many of them have established themselves by bringing destruction and misery on others. Daniel sees that this kind of political turmoil, war, and suffering will continue to the end of time.

One of the beasts in Daniel's vision had ten horns representing ten kings, but then Daniel sees another horn sprout on this beast. This new horn uproots three others and speaks boastfully, blasphemously, against God and persecutes his followers. It's just as Daniel seems horrified by the vision and must wonder how God's people would ever survive, that Daniel sees **thrones set in place and the Ancient of Days take his seat**. The last day has come and the judgment is about to begin.

Our God is a consuming fire. What a terrifying thought for those who boast against him! That person represented by the little horn, probably the Antichrist, the one who speaks boastfully against God and who persecutes true believers, the one who seems to have all the power and be able to do whatever he wants—he won't look so tough when he comes face to face with the Ancient of Days. He won't look so powerful when the one who is called ancient because he has always existed and always will exist drags him into his courtroom and pronounces the verdict **depart from me, you who are cursed, into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels**. He won't seem so terrifying when he is thrown into the river of fire that is flowing from the throne of God.

But wait. Haven't there been times when you and I have spoken boastfully against the Lord? Haven't there been times when we have said to the Lord, "Lord, I know what you say in your word. I know what your will is, but I don't want to do it that way. I want it my way." Haven't there been times when we have dared to say to the Ancient of Days, "Why did you let that

happen? That's just not right! You made a mistake, God!" There have been times when we have spoken boastfully against the Lord; probably more times than we would like to admit. We don't want to admit to those times because our God is a consuming fire. He is the Ancient of Days, the one who has always been there and has heard every excuse. He cannot be fooled. He cannot be bribed. He is absolutely pure. He shows no favoritism.

In Daniel's vision the last day, judgment day has come. The Court is seated and the books are opened.

You know how some people talk about a near death experience and having their life flash before their eyes. Well, the books that are opened in God's courtroom can make your life flash before your eyes. If you imagine these books like an Ebook or an iPad, all God has to do is click on your name and there it is; a record of everything you have ever said or done recorded in living color, with annotations that include your motive, the thoughts and attitude of your heart. That's why God can say to those on his left **"when I was hungry you didn't feed me; when I was in prison you didn't visit me."** And when they object claiming that they did do those things, he can point out, **"you didn't do them for me.** You did them with a selfish attitude. You did them for yourselves to be noticed by men and thinking that by doing those things you would earn a place in heaven. You wanted to boast in something other than me. OK. Have it your way. Depart from me into the fire prepared for the Devil and his angels."

So far there doesn't seem to be anything comforting in these verses of Daniel. It sounds like we are in just as much trouble as the horn that spoke boastfully. And we should be because we too have sinned. But there is comfort in what Daniel saw.

Did you notice that Daniel says he saw thrones, plural, more than one, being set in place? Also, he says that the court was seated. It's not just one person. Revelation helps us understand what Daniel was seeing when it talks about the **throne of God and of the Lamb.** One of the thrones that is set in place for the judgment is there for Jesus, the Lamb who was slain. He's there as a defense attorney, reminding the court of the fact that he perfectly carried out God's plan of salvation; that he lived perfectly on earth, never once speaking boastfully against God, always submitting perfectly to his will. He is there reminding the court of the fact that he had the Father punish him for the sins of the world so that forgiveness and salvation could be offered for free to all. Jesus is there serving as our advocate, our defense attorney.

There's something else that Revelation helps us understand. It tells us about the books that Daniel sees opened. John says, **I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.**

One set of books has your life recorded in it. But there is another book. It is the book of life and it has only names written in it. Anyone whose name is written in that book will not be thrown into the fire. Everyone whose name is written in the Lamb's book of life will be invited to live in God's kingdom, the New Jerusalem that the Lamb has prepared for them. All their

sins and boastful words have been covered by the blood of the Lamb. Any good things they did were done in and through them by God so that those on the right in the judgment, when they hear Jesus mention those good things, wonder when they did them. Their good deeds were fruits of faith done out of love for God, not as something to boast about or trust in.

The book of life has just names written in the blood of the Lamb. And the Lamb wrote your name in his book at your baptism when he called you to faith and washed away your sins.

What a comforting thing to know that when the Ancient of Days takes his seat and all people, including you and I, stand before him for judgment, Jesus is right there next to him. What a comforting thing it is to know that one of the books the judge will open contains only names, the names of all those who confess that they have nothing to boast about except what Jesus has done to save them. But what was perhaps most comforting for Daniel who was seeing how turbulent things would become on earth with nation after nation coming and going, and for us who have seen those things fulfilled, is the fact that God will put an end to the turmoil. When he comes again in glory there will be only one glorious, perfect kingdom that will last for ever and ever.

For those people and kingdoms who speak boastfully against the Lord; who think that they are strong enough to stand against him or even overcome him; our God is a terrifying, consuming fire. But for those who by God's grace boast not about themselves but about what God has done for them in Jesus, God is a consuming fire who rescues them once and for all from all their enemies.