**preached sermons:**

Colossians 1:15-20 (epistle/hymn)

Psalm 42 (psalm)

**sermon project:**

Micah 6:1-8 (prophecy/covenant lawsuit)

Matt 13:31-33 (parable)

Matt 12:1-14 (narrative)

Matt 5:17-20 (law/teaching)

Daniel 7 (apocalypse)

***Christ in Us, the Sufficient One***

Colossians 1:15-20

**Rhetorical and theological argument of the text:**

Colossians 1:15-20 is generally identified as a Christological hymn. One scholar argues that though this hymn may be of unclear origin, its “poetic meditation on Christ as Lord of creation and redemption”[[1]](#footnote-1) is “the center of Colossians with respect to both substance and style.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Following the typical Pauline introduction and thanksgiving, these verses serve to orient the epistle’s listeners to the overall theme upon which the remainder of the letter will continue to expound: Christ’s glorious sufficiency as a foundation for the Colossians’ faith and lives. Using a two-fold structure to address Christ’s roles in creation and redemption,[[3]](#footnote-3) it expresses the conviction that, as Pollard puts it, “since salvation and redemption are complete in Christ, the Colossians should not look to other sources.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Focus statement of sermon:**

The fullness of God dwells in Jesus, who is central to God’s creative-redemptive plan.

**Function statement of sermon:**

To reassure the audience that they may trust in and rely on this glorious Jesus, who, in addition to embodying the fullness of God, is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

**Plot Line of Sermon:**

For so many of us, it is *all too easy* to realize that we don’t measure up. But, you see, here’s the truth of the matter: we don’t *have* to be “good enough”—*that* is Jesus’s job!

And church, we *really can trust* in this glorious Jesus. But while our conversion *begins* at trust, it doesn’t *end* there; Jesus *transforms* us, too. And *now*, as *transformed people*, we can serve as *living witnesses* of God’s redemptive love.

**First paragraph of the introduction:**

For so many of us, it is *all too easy* to realize that we don’t measure up.

We often find it glaringly obvious at a personal level. When I again let my temper get the best of me and unintended, irrecoverable words fly out of my mouth and across the room, harming the ones I love… When I scrutinize the questions filling the pages of the final exam I’ve just taken in hand and I realize with a despairing heart that those seemingly *endless* hours I put in studying were not *nearly* enough… When another long-awaited, long-feared letter comes in the mail and I open it with dread-filled anticipation only to yet again see the terrible words “application denied”… When I enter the seemingly God-forsaken hospital room, with all the grief-stricken eyes turning to *me* for answers, and I suddenly feel the depth of my own inadequacy to offer *any* words of hope to people who are thus wrestling with God… [[5]](#footnote-5)

**Move 1**

* But, you see, here’s the truth of the matter: we don’t *have* to be “good enough”—*that* is Jesus’s job!
* This move brings our own heresy of self-reliance alongside the Colossians’ unnamed heresy of relying on something other than Christ.[[6]](#footnote-6) It reminds listeners that we are not supposed to rely on ourselves but rather on Jesus, pointing to the glory of Christ as proof of his sufficiency.
* Jesus, the glorious creator and redeemer, is good enough. And we don’t have to be.

**Move 2**

* And church, we *really can trust* in this glorious Jesus.
* This move examines more in depth the text of Colossians 1:15-20 (including a reading of the text), reassuring listeners that the glorious Jesus described by Paul in the passage truly is worthy of our trust.
* Instead, we now know the basis of *true* faith: if there is *anyone* on whom we should rely, *anyone* worthy of trust, it is *this Jesus*.

**Move 3**

* But while our conversion *begins* at trust, it doesn’t *end* there; Jesus *transforms* us, too.
* Using a relatively well-known adage as framework, this move indicates that our trust in Jesus leads to our transformation. Our relationship with Jesus is about more than merely understanding and accepting who we are; it is about becoming who we were meant to be: a new creation.[[7]](#footnote-7)
* As we submit in faith to God’s work in us, we are changed and the new creation emerges.

**Move 4 (also serves as the conclusion)**

* And *now*, as *transformed people*, we can serve as *living witnesses* of God’s redemptive love.
* This move points to the fact that our very existence as transformed people is a testimony to God’s power. Furthermore, it states that what we are witnessing to is quite simply the sufficient Jesus, “Christ in us, the hope of glory.”
* *Always* we witness to Christ in us, the one who is sufficient so that we, who know we cannot be good enough, do not have keep trying to measure up.

**Last paragraph of the conclusion/Move 4:**

Our message, then, is simple: It is *Christ in us*, the hope of redemption, whom we preach. It is *Christ in us*, the hope of wholeness, in whom we are made new. It is *Christ in us*, the fullness of God, on whom we rely… *Always* we witness to Christ in us, the one who is sufficient so that we, who know we cannot be good enough, do not have keep trying to measure up.

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***Lament: Our Act of Faith***

Psalm 42-43[[8]](#footnote-8)

**Rhetorical and theological argument of the text:**

Psalms 42-43 are psalms of individual lament.[[9]](#footnote-9) They present the situation of one who longs to feel some positive connection with God but feels instead only emptiness and abandonment. Taunted by enemies as well as his own memories, the psalmist examines his soul’s agitation. He grasps for hope and cries out to God to rescue him from his downcast state, declaring his confidence that he will one day again praise God. The refrain that echoes throughout the psalms (42:6, 12; 43:5) is, at some level, the theological argument of the psalmist: though there may indeed be reasons to feel distressed, God is my help, and I can trust in God’s redeeming power.

**Focus statement of sermon:**

God does not forsake us but rather hears our lament and cares.

**Function statement of sermon:**

To free those who feel abandoned to express trust in God through lament.

**Plot Line of Sermon:**

So *many* of us can identify with this experience of spiritual famine. But despite how we may feel, church, we are not God-forsaken. And as we wait on God, church, we can act in faith by letting God hear our laments.

**First paragraph of the introduction:**

She sat… in the midst of them… and she wept. No one saw the tears, of course, for they were streaming down the inside of her soul, not the outside of her face. Nonetheless, tearlessly, she wept… The burden of the moment was just too overpowering. For it was in *that* moment that she realized how *completely* separated from God she had become, how *severely* she *longed* to feel God’s presence again. Though “the sons of Korah” claimed them, the words of the psalm being read were hers:[[10]](#footnote-10)

**Move 1**

* So *many* of us can identify with this experience of spiritual famine.
* This move extends the metaphor of food/sustenance from the introduction to explore some of the ways in which we as Christians experience spiritual emptiness, as well as some of the ways in which we unsuccessfully seek to fill ourselves. It acknowledges that even ministers are prone to this problem.
* And over time we find ourselves wondering, along with this weeping woman, how did we become so spiritually *emaciated*? And, more importantly, *where* is our *God*? Surely God has left us.

**Move 2**

* But despite how we may feel, church, we are not God-forsaken.
* This move develops the idea that our feeling of forsakenness does not reflect reality. It may seem that God is out to get us at times.[[11]](#footnote-11) But we can recognize that this is not true because this is not who God is. God is the one who is faithful to us, even though we may have a hard time believing it. This psalm and other passages attest to all that.[[12]](#footnote-12)
* And we can wait on God, for we cling to this truth: God will never abandon us.

**Move 3/Conclusion**

* And as we wait on God, church, we can act in faith by letting God hear our laments.
* This move makes the claim that while we are still in the midst of spiritual famine, waiting on God to rescue us, our most faithful response is to lament. Quoting John Mark Hicks, it asserts that lament is a legitimate, helpful expression of relationship with God.[[13]](#footnote-13) It ends with a brief appeal to embrace lament in our own lives.
* Because we believe that God hears us and God cares, with the psalmist we too can cry out, “Why are you downcast, oh my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Wait for God, for I will still praise him, my salvation and my God.”

**Last paragraph of Move 3/Conclusion:**

So, church, when we and those around us experience spiritual emptiness like the weeping woman or like the writer of Psalms 42 and 43, let us remember: while we wait in hope for the God who has not abandoned us, we can freely express our faith through lament. Because we believe that God hears us and God cares, with the psalmist we too can cry out, “Why are you downcast, oh my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Wait for God, for I will still praise him, my salvation and my God.”

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***Offer Yourselves***

Micah 6:1-8

**Rhetorical and theological argument of the text:**

Placed in the section of the book (ch.6-7) that “describes the breaking and mending of the covenant,” this pericope is in the form of a covenant lawsuit.[[14]](#footnote-14) First Israel brings a charge of unfaithfulness against God, but God quickly proves God’s own faithfulness and turns the case around on Israel.[[15]](#footnote-15) Israel, struggling to redeem themselves, offers to make sacrifices that are exponentially more preposterous. They do not realize that God’s true desire for them is that they humbly walk alongside God and live lives of justice and mercy.

Essentially God says here, “Something is wrong in our relationship, and you seem to think it is my fault. Try me. I will subject myself to the appropriate punishment if you are proved right. But you won’t win this argument. There is an overpowering amount evidence to prove my love for you. What is actually wrong is that you do not seem to understand what our relationship should be. I will always be faithful to my to promise to redeem you and care for you, so please stop trying to win me over or buy me off with empty, ignorant sacrifices and instead simply walk beside me in a life that shows that you know me and want to imitate my character.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

**Focus statement of sermon:**

God does not need or desire religious ritual aside from a heart that is pursuing justice, mercy, and humble relationship with God.

**Function statement of sermon:**

To call the audience out of empty, legalistic ritual to a life of justice, mercy, and humble relationship with God.

You know, when it comes to religion, we’re really people who’ve kind of got it all together. But even though we feel like we’re mostly doing the right thing, sometimes our relationship with God still doesn’t feel quite right, like it’s good enough; so we wonder what’s missing, and we may even try all the harder. But the real problem, you see, is not that we’re not “religious” enough, it’s that we’ve misunderstood what God really wants from us. Rather than empty religious ritual, you see, God desires that we offer *ourselves* in lives that imitate and humbly walk alongside God.

**First paragraph of the introduction/Move 1:**

You know, when it comes to religion, we’re really people who’ve kind of got it all together. Okay, fine, maybe we’re not *absolutely perfect*. But who is? On a scale of 1 to 10, we’re probably a 9.8, maybe a 9.4 on a *bad* day. And that’s pretty incredible. Olympians don’t do a whole lot better. Yeah, it’s true…*we* are *pretty* impressive religiously. Yes, I’m talking to you! You and me. We’re the ones who are here week after week, leading singing, carefully listening to the sermons, teaching Sunday school classes, preparing the communion trays, vacuuming the floors, cleaning the bathrooms. You name it, we’re doing it. And on top of all that, there’s more. We’re the ones leading mission trips to far off places, heading up the budgeting committee, planning the church retreats. We’re the ones making sure our teenagers are in church rather than out playing softball on Wednesday nights, organizing our families’ weekly devotionals, teaching our little ones their bedtime prayers. Yeah, on that scale of 1 to 10, we’re definitely pretty close to the top.

**Introduction/Move 1**

* You know, when it comes to religion, we’re really people who’ve kind of got it all together.
* Using some examples that are familiar to most churchgoers, this move will briefly sketch our religious “competence.” We know the religio-cultural expectations that surround us, we know the liturgical moves we should make, we know the correct attitudes to display and the right words to say. After all, we are the ones who’re at church week after week. We’re good at religious ritual. As opposed to some others, we’ve got it all together.
* Oh yes, when it comes to religion, we know what we’re doing.

**Move 2**

* But even though we feel like we’re mostly doing the right thing, sometimes our relationship with God still doesn’t feel quite right, like it’s good enough; so we wonder what’s missing, and we may even try all the harder.
* This move will begin to explore the tendency we have to try to fix our empty relationship with God by piling more empty, legalistic expectations on ourselves. It will examine similar attempts by the Israelites in Micah 6:6-7 (perhaps even briefly touching on the possibility that arises in our minds that maybe it’s God’s fault things aren’t working out right). Toward the end, the move will begin to shift the audience toward the uncertainty and dissonance that we can feel when we realize that our religious “competence” is somehow not getting us where we want to go, that is, into deeper relationship with God.
* We try *so* hard, filling our lives to overflowing with religiosity until we finally exhaust ourselves in our attempts to make our empty relationship with God feel right.

**Move 3**

* But the real problem, you see, is not that we’re not “religious” enough, it’s that we’ve misunderstood what God really wants from us.
* This move will first recognize that our religious activity fails to fix our relationship with God, perhaps using the image of a black hole as illustration of how destructive our legalistic religiosity can be. It will then argue that we do not have unfulfilled relationships with God because we’re not doing religion well enough for God but rather because that’s not what God actually desires from us.
* Yes, sadly, we’ve missed the point, and because we’re not sure what God actually wants from us, we’ve filled our lives with empty religious trappings that merely serve to weigh us down.

**Move 4**

* Rather than empty religious ritual, you see, God desires that we offer *ourselves* in lives that imitate and humbly walk alongside God.
* Beginning with the dissonance that Moves 2 and 3 have recognized, this move will use Micah 6:8 to resolve that dissonance. It will explore the idea that God did not require the increasingly preposterous offerings that the Israelites proposed in 6:6-7, nor does God require the increasingly preposterous offerings that we make.[[17]](#footnote-17) Rather, God desires hearts that are pursuing God and lives lived in imitation of God’s justice and mercy. This is “Yahweh’s remedy” to the perilous ailment of the heart that the Israelites find themselves facing.[[18]](#footnote-18)
* Don’t just offer God your religious ritual. Offer so much more. Offer *yourselves* in lives of justice, mercy, and humble relationship with God. Offer *yourselves* as imitators of God who want to walk alongside God. And when you offer yourselves, you’ll be amazed at the kind of life God offers back.

**Last paragraph of the conclusion/Move 4:**

We ask, then, what heartfelt sacrifice of justice, mercy, and humility might God desire of us? Perceptively noting our helplessness without God in the first place, Augustine sums Micah 6:1-8 up well and wisely when he writes, “You ask what you should offer: offer yourself. For what else does the Lord seek of you but you? Because of all earthly creatures he has made nothing better than you, he seeks yourself from yourself, because you have lost yourself.”[[19]](#footnote-19) And that is my charge to you today, church. Don’t just offer God your religious ritual. Offer so much more. Offer *yourselves* in lives of justice, mercy, and humble relationship with God. Offer *yourselves* as imitators of God who want to walk alongside God. And when you offer yourselves, you’ll be amazed at the kind of life God offers back.

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***The Kingdom of Heaven is Like Kudzu***

Matthew 13:31-33

**Rhetorical and theological argument of the text:**

The parables of the mustard seed (13:31-32) and yeast (13:33) are paired together to illustrate that though the beginnings of God’s kingdom are unobtrusive, we can anticipate immense, permeating growth from it.[[20]](#footnote-20) By making the analogy to these two familiar items, Jesus helps his disciples understand that/why they are facing opposition,[[21]](#footnote-21) perhaps even (in true Jesus-like fashion) reversing the perception of those items to indicate their positive correlations to the kingdom.[[22]](#footnote-22)

**Focus statement of sermon:**

God’s kingdom may have inconspicuous beginnings, but it is powerful and all-pervading.

**Function statement of sermon:**

To invigorate the audience with faith in God’s powerful, pervading kingdom, of which they are a part.

**Plot Line of Sermon:**

1) The kingdom of heaven is like kudzu. 2) “Now wait a minute,” you say, “I haven’t heard that parable.” No? You haven’t heard the parable of the kudzu? Well, Jesus told it, or almost… 3) But the point, you see, is not that mustard and yeast and kudzu are all great images for a story (though they are, to be sure). The point is that they all say something about what God’s kingdom is like. 4) And you know what? You’re a part of that impressive, invasive, formidable, all-consuming kingdom.

**Introduction/Move 1:**[[23]](#footnote-23)

The kingdom of heaven is like kudzu.[[24]](#footnote-24) At first glance it seems like an unassuming plant, nothing too special. But once it’s taken root in a place, it takes over. It overwhelms all the other plants around it. It spreads to cover telephone poles… hillsides… cars… houses… Some call it “the vine that ate the South.”[[25]](#footnote-25) Some credit it with “preventing the whole state of Mississippi from being washed down the river” and remind us that it is the only plant whose growth can be measured in miles per hour.[[26]](#footnote-26) Yes, that’s right, the kingdom of heaven is like kudzu.

**Introduction/Move 1 (Summarized)**

* The kingdom of heaven is like kudzu.
* By retelling the parables of Matthew 13:31-33 and replacing the analogy with the familiar image of kudzu, this brief move will paint a vivid picture of the kingdom’s growth and nature that the audience can more easily relate to.[[27]](#footnote-27)
* Yes, that’s right, the kingdom of heaven is like kudzu.

**Move 2**

* “Now wait a minute,” you say, “I haven’t heard that parable.” No? You haven’t heard the parable of the kudzu? Well, Jesus told it, or almost…
* In this *very* brief move, the text of Matthew 13:31-33 will be read.
* Though he may have used different images that made sense to the people of his time and place, Jesus definitely told this same parable.

**Move 3**

* But the point, you see, is not that mustard and yeast and kudzu are all great images for a story (though they are, to be sure). The point is that they all say something about what God’s kingdom is like.
* This move will take on somewhat of a teaching tone to explore the attributes (both positive and negative) of mustard, yeast, and kudzu and then the kingdom comparisons that Jesus was making through his analogies.[[28]](#footnote-28) The kingdom may be small and insignificant looking at first, so we may not imagine that it has the pervasive power that it does. But as unremarkable as it may seem, the kingdom will ultimately manifest itself if astounding ways, much like kudzu.
* Yes… these images all point to a deeper truth about the kingdom: though it may not look all that inspiring at first, it’s got power you wouldn’t believe.

**Move 4**

* And you know what? You’re a part of that impressive, invasive, formidable, all-consuming kingdom.
* This move will draw the audience into the story of kingdom as participants rather than just observers. It will emphasize that the kingdom hasbeen inaugurated and that we as Christians are part of its powerful growth.[[29]](#footnote-29) Continuing with the parabolic image of kudzu, it will compare familiar concretizations of the kingdom’s presence within the audience to kudzu leaves, illustrating the power and growth of the kingdom one leaf/concretization at a time.
* That’s right, if the kingdom of God is like kudzu, *you* and your Christ-like actionsare the leaves, the runners, taking over the world one square inch at a time.

**Last paragraph of the conclusion:**

So here’s the rub of the parable: You can trust that God’s kingdom is growing, even if it doesn’t always seem like it. And not only that, you’re *part of* that growing kingdom. So, my friends, let’s get out there and watch the kudzu of the kingdom take over everything around it. Better yet, let’s get out there and be the kudzu God made us to be!

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***Choosing a Yoke that Fits***

Matthew 12:1-14

**Rhetorical and theological argument of the text:**

In this narrative section of Matthew, Jesus is confronted twice by the Pharisees for doing things they considered unlawful (allowing his disciples to pluck and eat grain from the field and healing a man, both on the Sabbath). Both times, he makes an argument from a lesser good (to which they can assent) to the greater good (of what they are disputing). As he does so, he proclaims his authority over the Sabbath and reminds the Pharisees of God’s true desires concerning the law (Hosea 6:6, quoted in 12:7).[[30]](#footnote-30) In their Matthean context, these episodes are concretizations of Jesus’ immediately previous invitation in 11:28-30; Jesus, the merciful healer and lord of the Sabbath, offers an easy yoke and a light burden, particularly when compared to the Pharisees’ heavy burden that leaves those who attempt to carry it weary.[[31]](#footnote-31)

**Focus statement of sermon:**

God offers a way of life that is intended to be an “easy yoke” that fits, rather than a “heavy burden.”

**Function statement of sermon:**

To urge the audience to choose the “easy yoke” that informs God’s laws rather than the “heavy burden” of legalistic human tradition that can weigh us down.

**Plot Line of Sermon:**

It’s pretty likely that most of us have felt weighed down by religious expectations at some point in our lives. But I have good news for you—we don’t have to live under that kind of heavy burden; the way of Jesus is different than that! Before you make that decision, though, you’ll need to know that living under Jesus’ easy yoke requires us to recognize and submit to him as our authoritative lord. But when we do, we can be released from legalistic expectations to live in the freedom of godly mercy, wisdom, and *rest*.

**First paragraph of the introduction:**

(Though I don’t have exact words or a precise story in mind yet for this introduction, I do have two options in mind, each creating a different kind of mood. The two could perhaps be combined in order of increasing seriousness. First, the introduction might go the somewhat humorous route of offering examples of preposterous ways of being weighed down, illustrated by pictures and videos.[[32]](#footnote-32) Alternatively, it might take the form of a story of someone who is far too overworked, far too weighed down. The story would be told in a manner that creates audience identification, probably beginning at the conclusion of the story, its logical end in which the person just can’t take it anymore and begins to break down. Then it would then recount the gradual building up of expectations that brought the person to that point.)

**Move 1**

* It’s pretty likely that most of us have felt weighed down by religious expectations at some point in our lives.
* This move will explore the ways that we Christians tend to place expectations on ourselves that God does not have for us. It will acknowledge the weight of these burdens that we place on ourselves unnecessarily, perhaps using a physical demonstration to emphasize the point (placing multiple bundles of various shapes and sizes into the hands/onto the back of a willing volunteer to simulate the religious expectations we shoulder).
* Yes, at times it feels like there’s so much weight on us that we can’t carry it all.

**Move 2**

* But I have good news for you—we don’t have to live under that kind of heavy burden; the way of Jesus is different than that!
* This move will contrast the easy yoke of Jesus with the heavy burdens that we place on ourselves through our legalism. It will engage the text (including the reference to Hosea), showing how Jesus overturned the superfluous religious traditions (and accusations) of the Pharisees and offered a return to God’s alternative, better way of life: healing, wholeness, and fulfillment. It will also explicitly relate Matthew 12:1-14 to the preceding passage, Matthew 11:28-30. If the physical demonstration was used in Move 1, Move 2 will offer a continuation of that (using another volunteer to compare Jesus’ expectations to our own).
* So, really, it’s your choice—do you choose to be weighed down by the burdens we place on ourselves, or do you choose instead to take up Jesus’ yoke, the one that is designed to fit well and be easy on us?

**Move 3**

* Before you make that decision, though, you’ll need to know that living under Jesus’ easy yoke requires us to recognize and submit to him as our authoritative lord.
* This move will address the Pharisees’ attitudes toward Jesus in the text. Rather than learning from him and accepting his teaching, they stubbornly held onto their own way of looking at things, even plotting to kill Jesus.[[33]](#footnote-33) If we are to live under Jesus’ easy yoke, we cannot have the same kind of attitude. We must, rather, accept Jesus’ claims to authority and prescriptions about what is good.[[34]](#footnote-34)
* Yes, if we’re going to choose to live under Jesus’ yoke—and I hope we do!—we have to first accept Jesus himself as our master.

**Move 4**

* But when we do, we can be released from legalistic expectations to live in the freedom of godly mercy, wisdom, and *rest*.
* Using concretizations, this move will illustrate for the audience what a life lived under Jesus’ yoke can look like. It will recognize that the approach to Sabbath that Jesus was advocating for in this passage was an instantiation of his yoke being easy and his burden light.[[35]](#footnote-35) The move will emphasize the freedom we have under Jesus’ yoke, as well as our grounding in mercy (Hosea 6:6), and wisdom and rest (both in 11:29, as a result of accepting Jesus’ way and authority).
* By recognizing Jesus as lord and accepting his yoke, we can let go of our own heavy burdens and live the way God intended us to.

**Last paragraph of the conclusion:**

So, church, again the decision is ours… Do we want to live laden down by the religious expectations we and so many others pile on top of us? Or do we want to let go of all that, stop grasping it so tightly because of its familiarity and security, and instead trust that Jesus knows what he’s talking about? Do we want to accept his offer of a load in life that fits, that rests easily on our shoulders, that brings us rest? I know that’s what I’d prefer. Why don’t you join me in that?

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***A New Way of Living the Same Old Law***

Matthew 5:17-20

**Rhetorical and theological argument of the text:**

By providing a summary of Jesus’ attitude toward the law, this section of teaching undergirds and serves as an interpretive key for the ensuing antithesis section of the Sermon on the Mount.[[36]](#footnote-36) Within this passage itself, Jesus asserts that he has not come to eradicate the law and the prophets but rather to fulfill them in a new way.[[37]](#footnote-37) As Witherington says, “Jesus does not call his disciples to resubmit to the Mosaic covenant. He calls them to submit to God’s new eschatological plan and covenant, which is part and parcel of the Dominion breaking into space and time. He calls them to submit to wisdom that is both some parts old and some parts new.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Requiring that his followers’ righteousness “exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees,” Jesus will go on to concretize this new level of righteous living in the following verses.

**Focus statement of sermon:**

Jesus has the authority to lay out a new law for us and command a greater righteousness from us.

**Function statement of sermon:**

To challenge the audience to accept Jesus’ summons to live in greater righteousness according to Jesus’ law.[[39]](#footnote-39)

**Plot Line of Sermon:**

You may have heard it said that the Old Testament laws no longer apply to us as Christians. But I’m here to tell you that, at least in a way, they do, for Jesus doesn’t abolish the “law and the prophets” but rather fulfills it.[[40]](#footnote-40) And Jesus calls us as his followers to live within the *heart* of that law, with righteousness that surpasses anything we could have imagined previously.

**Introduction:[[41]](#footnote-41)**

Did you know that in Texas it’s illegal to shoot a buffalo from the second story of a hotel? Darn. I was planning on a hunting trip from the balcony of the Whitten Inn this weekend! Another Texas law states that “When two trains meet each other at a railroad crossing, each shall come to a full stop, and neither shall proceed until the other has gone.” Hmmmmm…. I’m having a hard time figuring out how that one works.... Then there’s the law that says that criminals have to give their victims twenty-four hours notice, either orally or in writing, and explain the nature of the crime to be committed. Good luck enforcing that one, right? And, I’m sorry to disappoint you, but even here in Abilene, it’s illegal to idle or loiter anyplace within the corporate limits of the city for the purpose of flirting or mashing (whatever that even means!).

Yes, we all know that these kind of laws still exist… But here’s the thing: we also all know that they’re the *silliest*, most *antiquated* things we’ve ever heard of, so even though they’re *technically* still on the books and even though we could *technically* be thrown in jail for forgetting to ask permission before eating our neighbor’s garbage… we don’t worry about it. These laws are just a relic of the past. And that’s how they should be treated, right? Right…? Well, whatever your thoughts on the matter, you might not realize that we run into a similar kind of situation as Christians…

**Introduction/Move 1**

* You may have heard it said that the Old Testament laws no longer apply to us as Christians.
* This move will examine the claim that "New Testament Christians” don’t have to live under the Old Testament law, for that is part of the old, which has passed away. It will take a look at a few of the examples of Old Testament laws that most Christians would consider inapplicable, even ridiculous, thereby using them as justification for the claim that Old Testament laws shouldn’t be followed.
* “How on earth could those kinds of laws apply to us?” we wonder. And the answer forming in our minds seems pretty obviously true: “They don’t!”

**Move 2**

* But I’m here to tell you that, at least in a way, they do, for Jesus doesn’t merely abolish the “law and the prophets” but rather fulfills them.
* This move will include a reading of the text. It will assess Jesus’ attitude toward the law—that he fulfills it—perhaps including a quick review of his opponents’ accusations concerning his treatment of the law.[[42]](#footnote-42) It will also consider the possibility that while some parts of the Old Testament law have already been completelyfulfilled in Jesus and are therefore no longer applicable to us, the overall heart and intent of the law remains intact for Christians.[[43]](#footnote-43)
* You see, though the law may look a little different now because of Jesus’ redemptive actions, the fact remains: Jesus, the authoritative teacher, says that the law endures, and so it does.

**Move 3**

* And Jesus calls us as his followers to live within the *heart* of that law, with righteousness that surpasses anything we could have imagined previously.
* Based upon the previous move’s assertions, this move will paint a picture of the kind of righteous life that Jesus calls us to—a life submitted to God’s laws and pursuing the righteous heart and actions indicated within those laws.[[44]](#footnote-44) The move will refer back to the antiquated laws of the introduction and consider how they too may have been indicating something deeper, something which we would still consider guiding for our lives. And, noting the concretizations that Jesus gives in the remainder of chapter 5, the move will also include a selection of our congregation’s own concretizations to demonstrate what a righteous, lawful life can look like practically for them.
* Yes, Jesus calls us to a new way of living the same old law.

**Last paragraph of the conclusion:**

So the question remains, will we do it? Here’s Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, telling us what is demanded of us if we are to be part of his kingdom. He calls us to be people of a better kind of righteousness and shows us just exactly what that looks like. He challenges us to keep the law in the way that it was always meant to be kept. So… the question now is just simply, will we do it? Why don’t you join me today in seeking after righteousness, seeking after the heart of the law, seeking after Jesus? And together we’ll find a new way of living the same old law.

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***God Conquers All!***

Daniel 7

**Rhetorical and theological argument of the text:**

Daniel 7 comes to us in the form of an apocalyptic dream. The chapter, right in the midst of the book, serves as a pivot point, closing one section and opening another.[[45]](#footnote-45) In true apocalyptic form, it uses a great deal of imagery to narrate the conflict between earthly and heavenly powers—conflict in which God is inevitably the victor. As Tremper Longman summarizes Daniel 7, “the vision teaches God’s people that, although it looks as if the world is under the power of human evil running rampant and is not under God’s control, in this case looks are deceiving. God is in control, and there is no question concerning who is going to win this struggle. Stay faithful.”[[46]](#footnote-46) The text reassures Daniel as well as readers throughout time that the God they serve is truly the sovereign of heaven and earth and that all people and powers—particularly those that appear most evilly threatening—will yield to God’s divine authority.

**Focus statement of sermon:**

In the end, God conquers all evil.

**Function statement of sermon:**

To encourage the audience to hold fast to faith in their conquering God.[[47]](#footnote-47)

**Plot Line of Sermon:**

Church, you’d better believe it: we too are surrounded by the forces of evil, and they’re threatening to overwhelm us. And sadly, this isn’t a new problem; evil has always threatened to overwhelm good. But, as we can see in Daniel’s apocalyptic vision, evil will not win. So even when things are looking pretty bleak, church, let’s hold fast to faith in our all-conquering God, for things will get better!

**First paragraph of the introduction:**

(I do not have exact wording for this introductory paragraph, but it will take the form of a story, preferably historic, about an army that is surrounded by its enemies. The situation is hopeless, and it seems there will be no way out. The army will be conquered, and the evil enemies will win.[[48]](#footnote-48))

**Move 1**

* Church, you’d better believe it: we too are surrounded by the forces of evil, and they’re threatening to overwhelm us.
* Noting the metaphor from the introduction, this move will draw the audience further into our problem: evil surrounds us, and it seems that evil will overwhelm us. The move will give familiar instances of such devastating evil—from church life, from recent news, perhaps from well known literary and cinematic visualizations. As a preface to the rest of the sermon, it will pull the audience into the emotive state of despair and hopelessness.
* Yes, church, we’re surrounded, and it seems that there’s no way out.

**Move 2**

* And sadly, this isn’t a new problem; evil has always threatened to overwhelm good.
* This move will serve as an extension of Move 1, projecting the problem of evil further back into human history, noting the perpetual nature of the dilemma. Working backwards in time, it may give further historical examples (even including biblical references, all the way back to Satan’s temptation of Adam and Eve). It will then examine the vision of Daniel 7:1-8 as one instance of evil’s threat to overpower.[[49]](#footnote-49)
* It seems, then, that we in the church today are not alone—the problem of evil has persisted throughout history.

**Move 3**

* But, if we read a little further into Daniel’s apocalyptic vision, there’s good news: though it’s hard to believe, it seems that evil will not win after all!
* Having established the persistence of the problem of evil in Move 2, this move seeks to undermine the possibility that may therefore have arisen in people’s minds that evil is not just persistent but *permanent* and *unassailable*. It looks at Daniel 7:9-14, acknowledging the apocalyptic, all-times nature of the passage[[50]](#footnote-50) and emphasizing God’s power over and judgment of evil.[[51]](#footnote-51) Again assuming the story of the introduction,[[52]](#footnote-52) this move portrays for the audience the conquering power of God and what a world devoid of evil may look like.[[53]](#footnote-53)
* We can be encouraged, then, that in Daniel, in our own lives, and for all time, God conquers evil.

**Move 4/Conclusion**

* So even when things are looking pretty bleak, church, let’s hold fast to faith in our all-conquering God, for things will get better!
* This move will challenge the audience to let go of their fear that evil may overwhelm them. Because God truly does conquer evil, as Move 3 has indicated, we can have faith in God that will carry us through the hard times. There is no need to live in trepidation and timidity, and the correct response to evil should be one of humble victory.[[54]](#footnote-54)
* Yes, church, have faith—things will get better, because our all-conquering God is going before us to vanquish evil.

**Last paragraph of Move 4/Conclusion:**

Yes, things may look bad now, church, just as they did for Daniel. Evil may be swarming around us. But the message of Daniel’s vision rings loud and clear: God will conquer! And because God will conquer, because God *always* has the upper hand, we have nothing to fear. You see, we’re on the right side, the winning side. Yes, church, have faith—things will get better, because our all-conquering God is going before us to vanquish evil.

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1. Todd D. Still, “Colossians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians-Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 270. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 287. Still, who sees no reason not to attribute the hymn (or the letter) to Paul, goes on to state that the hymn is “not intended to be a piece of abstract christological speculation; rather, it is meant to be a confessional doxology in service of pastoral theology.” Ibid., 296. Other scholars disagree, however. Some regard these verses as preexistent and non-Pauline, and some even consider the hymn incongruent with the rest of Colossians. Though he does not embrace their conclusions, see for example, arguments presented in Peter T. O’Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians and Philemon*, vol. 44 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 32-3 and 40-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Still., 289. O’Brien presents alternative views on poetic structure; see O’Brien 33-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. J. Paul Pollard, “Colossians,” in *The Transforming Word*: *A One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2009), 973. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As Still notes, “The tenor and tone of the letter suggest that in writing to the church Paul was being more proactive than reactive, more preventative than corrective.” Still, 267. Furthermore, Mike Cope pointed out to me only yesterday the significance of Paul’s beginning the letter with the solution rather than the problem. However, given the pressures of time, I have not been able to rearrange my sermon to reflect these points. If I were to rewrite it, however, I would take them into further consideration and see how/if they changed the tone and flow of the sermon. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. No scholarly majority backs any one opinion of what the “Colossian heresy was,” though most do claim that it did exist. (See, for example, O’Brien’s exploration of some of the possibilities in his commentary, xxxiii-xxxviii.) However, Still points out that “Paul regarded the views these people were espousing as devaluing and in effect deprecating the person and work of Christ.” Still, 268. The major way that modern American Christians seem to devalue and deprecate the person and work of Christ, I believe, is through self-reliance, thus the comparison. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Though new creation is only briefly mentioned in this hymn, when it does, as Still points out, “The focus falls on Christ’s indispensable role in inaugurating the new creation. By virtue of his resurrection, a new day has dawned.” Still, 292. It is therefore a significant theme within the passage and within my sermon. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Though biblically Psalms 42 and 43 are enumerated separately, most scholars maintain that they are connected in some way. It is possible that Psalm 43 was composed separately to go along with Psalm 42. [See John Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, vol. 2 of *Psalms*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 21.] Others believe that Psalm 43 was originally part of Psalm 42 but was at some point separated from it. [For a brief synopsis of this view, see Peter C. Craige, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary 19 (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 325.] Whatever their compositional history, however, it is clear that Psalms 42 and 43 are interconnected, as they share common phrasing (especially in the refrain of 42:6, 12 and 43:5) and as Psalm 43 provides a continuation of (and perhaps a tiny bit of resolution for) Psalm 42 (Goldingay, 30). For that reason, I will treat them (and preach them) as one here. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Some see these as communal lament psalms, if only because they are placed in a communal liturgical context. [See John Mark Hicks, “Preaching Community Laments,” in *Performing the Psalms*, ed. Dave Bland and David Fleer (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), 70.] However, as Craige argues, such an interpretation has little evidence, and given the individualistic language of the psalms themselves, it is better to interpret them as an individual’s personal lament. (Craige, 325.) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In the introduction, the emotions of Psalm 42-43 are encountered through a glimpse into the mind of a woman for whom they are particularly poignant. This is my own way of renarrating the psalm, giving it a new superscription and owner, as Walter Brueggemann suggests. See Walter Brueggemann, “Psalms in Narrative Performance,” in *Performing the Psalms*, ed. Dave Bland and David Fleer (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), 21-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. As Philip Johnston and David Firth point out, the pounding waters of 42:8 convey a “sense of unrelenting, successive difficulties sent by God.” See Philip S. Johnston, “The Psalms and Distress,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. David Firth and Philip S. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 70. I have also explored this interpretation briefly in an exegesis project on Psalm 42 for Dr. Jonathan Huddleston’s introductory Hebrew class at ACU. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The sermon specifically notes the cases of Adam and Eve, Israel, and Jesus as evidence for God’s faithfulness. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Hicks, 79-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Some see only v.1-5 as part of the covenant lawsuit, assigning v.6-8 instead to the genre of entrance liturgy concerned with admittance to the sanctuary for worship. Leslie Allen notes the two parts of a covenantal formulation here in Micah 6: “a recital of Yahweh’s saving deeds and a call to obedience. It is these two motifs that are here dressed in the garb borrowed from the lawcourt and the sanctuary.” See Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 363. Allen goes on, however, to outline how this pericope lines up perfectly with the five constituent parts of a covenant lawsuit (introduction with witnesses, statement of case, accusation of ingratitude, rejection of recourse to sacrifice, verdict or caution urging change of conduct), 364. For more on covenant lawsuits, see Herbert B. Huffmon, “The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets,” *JBL* 78, no. 4 (1959). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I will largely leave aside the aspect of the passage that calls into question God’s faithfulness. Though this is an important part of the passage, to address it in depth in this sermon would be an attempt to accomplish too much. The theme would, however, serve well for another sermon, perhaps (with some needed adjustments) one preached immediately before or after this sermon. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. I wrote this paraphrase of the passage for an exegesis paper (also entitled “Offer Yourselves”) for Dr. Huddleston’s *Introduction to Old Testament* class in the summer of 2012. Some of my references, footnotes, and phrasing throughout this sermon sketch may come from that paper as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Sacrifice [for Christians, read “religious activity”] is not proscribed by Micah 6:8. It is, however rightly relocated as an ancillary indication of the kind of life that God truly desires: one of justice, mercy, and humble relationship with God. As Gary Smith puts it, “God’s radical requirements are more comprehensive and more penetrating than the casual deed of just bringing an animal to sacrifice at the temple. His covenant relationship lays a claim on every human relationship, calls every act into loyal submission to the covenant agreement, and desires that every attitude of selfishness be prudently submitted to God’s will.” Gary Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 554. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. I have borrowed the phrase “Yahweh’s remedy” from Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 24E (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 503, and would likely use the phrase in this move of the sermon itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Augustine, Sermon 48.2, quoted in Alberto Ferreiro, ed. *The Twelve Prophets,* Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 172 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. “His parable teaches the crowd that they must not let the present, inconspicuous form of the kingdom fool them from understanding what will be its final result.” Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 484. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 334. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. It is possible that both mustard and yeast were typically considered intrusive and destructive. (Turner, 345, notes some of the biblical references in which yeast is perceived negatively.) However, Ryan Schellenberg argues that such negative associations with mustard and yeast, though popular among interpreters, are “not well enough attested to bear the interpretive weight that has placed on them.” Ryan S. Schellenberg, “Kingdom as Contaminant? The Role of Repertoire in the Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71 (2009), 527. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. As it stands in this sermon sketch, this paragraph is the complete text of the introduction/Move 1. It could be lengthened through further elaboration if desirable, however. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. This sermon will begin by following the homiletical tactic of preaching a parable by telling a parable. During the telling of this parable, it would probably also be effective to display some pictures of kudzu’s humble beginnings and its overwhelming multiplying power. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kudzu\_in\_the\_United\_States. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Said hyperbolically, of course. This comes from “Kudzu and the Kingdom of God,” Buck Naked Faith Blog, entry posted April 18, 2005, <http://bucknakedfaith.blogspot.com/2005/04/kudzu-and-kingdom-of-god.html> (accessed November 29, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. This sermon would be most effectively preached to a crowd of Southerners, who would be quite familiar with kudzu and its effects. For more on kudzu, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kudzu>, where the article even names it a noxious weed. And a Google search for “kingdom of God kudzu” turns up a number of interesting articles, blog posts, and sermons. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. As with mustard and yeast, there is the potential for negative connotations tied to kudzu. Those negative connotations might need to be addressed. If so, Move 3 would probably be the appropriate place to do so. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The move will briefly acknowledge both that the kingdom should not be equated with the church and that it has not yet been fulfilled (Wilkins, 504). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. David Turner notes that Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 “to underline a basic hermeneutical conflict between himself and the Pharisees.” Jesus’ own “hermeneutic is based on his authoritative stance and his prioritization of human need over oral legal tradition.” David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 309-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Since I do view these texts as illustration of the principle found in 11:28-30, that passage will become an integral part of what is preached here even though it is not explicitly part of the day’s reading. Concerning context even further, these passages are part of a pattern found in this part of Matthew in which two pericopes stressing unbelief are followed by one stressing belief (in this instance, 12:15-21). See Turner, 307. Additionally, it seems to me that the texts are well framed by 11:2-6, in which Jesus tells John that the sick are healed and that the ones who take no offense at him are blessed, 11:25-27, where wisdom is given to infants rather than the intelligent (calling to mind the Pharisees), 12:22-34, where Jesus is proved to have authority from God and be of God, and 12:33-37, in which one’s actions display one’s true nature. The themes from each of these passages can be seen in the one at hand. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. For example, the popular picture of a donkey overwhelmed by the load in the cart he carries, found here: http://treenewt.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/donkey-w-cart1.jpg. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. As Turner points out, “Jesus is perceived as a threat to the status quo.” The Pharisees, unable to accept such a threat, plan to kill him, and as Turner then notes astutely, “It is not a little ironic that a dispute over the finer points of Sabbath law leads the Pharisees to plan to break the sixth commandment.” Turner, 314. Michael Wilkins points out another degree of irony when he notes that the Pharisees used (and staunchly held onto!) only an *interpretation* of the Old Testament as evidence, whereas (in 12:3-5) Jesus used the Old Testament stories and commands themselves, yet the Pharisees would not accept his argument. See Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 439. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. For instance, as Ben Witherington notes, Jesus “believed the Sabbath was the perfect day to give a person rest from that which plagued him or her,” and “things that amounted to good deeds that could be seen as a fulfillment of the intent of the Sabbath to give rest, restoration, refreshment were appropriate.” Ben Witherington III, *Matthew*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2006), 242-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. In light of the previous chapter, where the religious leaders had wearied the people but Jesus came to give the yoke of discipleship, here Jesus is offering “the kind of true rest to which the Sabbath rest was designed to point…. The Sabbath law has been fulfilled in the rest brought by Jesus’ yoke of discipleship.” Wilkins, 438-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. This subsequent section contains the well known “you have heard it said… but I say to you” teachings. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Inherent in such a claim are presuppositions of authority. Jesus does not merely teach the law [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ben Witherington III, *Matthew*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2006), 117. David Turner concurs, stating that “Jesus does not contradict or abrogate the law and the prophets, but neither does he merely reaffirm them. He fulfills them or brings them to their divinely intended goal, because they point to him.” David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. With such a function statement, this sermon could serve as a good introduction to a series on the Sermon on the Mount. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. These first two moves follow the rhetorical strategy that Jesus does in the remainder of Matthew 5: “you have heard it said… but I say to you.” [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. The content for the introduction was largely found on the web post “Craziest Texas Laws Still on the Books,” <http://voices.yahoo.com/craziest-texas-laws-still-books-6254114.html> (accessed December 3, 2012). Others can be found at http://www.idiotlaws.com and http://www.dumblaws.com. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. As Michael Wilkins points out, “The expression ‘do not think’ suggests that Jesus is countering a suspicion that he is attempting to set aside God’s former revelation with his announcement of the arrival of the kingdom of God. Such an attempt would be the ultimate mark of a heretic.” Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 227-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. This section will deal most closely with 5:18-19, considering the seriousness of Jesus’ attitude toward the law as well as how/if the law may be abrogated. It will examine Tremper Longman’s claim that “As we read the New Testament, there is neither strict continuity (as theonomists would insist) nor discontinuity (as some dispensationalists would have it), but rather both continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments.” See Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Wilkins notes that Jesus’ “disciples are called to a different *kind* and *quality* of righteousness, not an increased quantity.” Wilkins, 231. He goes on, maintaining that for Jesus’s followers “It will not be enough to conform one’s behavior to an external obedience of any particular law. Rather, Jesus’ disciples will understand the realities to which the Law pointed and will have a heart transformation and obedience that is accomplished through new covenant life in the Spirit.” Ibid., 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Daniel 7 obviously fits with the remainder of the book’s apocalyptic visions. For a brief description of how it also fits with the preceding chapters, see John D. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 1987), 157-9. Goldingay’s book is an excellent (and exceedingly intricate) reading of Daniel. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. As Longman notes, the “original intention of apocalyptic [is] to provide comfort to God’s people during times of trouble.” Longman, 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Though the overall story will not actually end in this bleak way, the portion of it told for the purposes of this introduction will end in a desperately, despairingly. References to the story will then be woven throughout the developing sermon. The army, to be clear, is equated to the church. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Rather than going the route of closely examining the attributes of the beasts of Daniel 7, this sermon will follow Longman’s advice that “caution and reserve are values in the interpretation of apocalyptic” and will, for the somewhat broad purposes of this sermon, simply categorize the beasts as exemplifying evil. Longman, 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. This interpretation depends upon the belief that apocalyptic literature is meant to reveal timeless truths, not just to point to past or future events (though those too may be included in the all-times nature of apocalypse). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. The move may note the courtroom imagery of Daniel 7, including the portrayal of God as a wise judge whose fire illumines and purifies. Depending on the time allowable and the audience, the move may also examine the “son of man” figure in Daniel 7. Interpretations on who the “son of man” might be here are many. See Goldingay, 169-72 for a number of possibilities. W. Sibley Towner points out that the language and context of the phrase allows for the figure to be either a human-looking divine representative of the angels or a representative of human beings and forerunner/type of ultimate human destiny. W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1984), 104. Despite his eschewing (for some good reasons) the typical Christian interpretation of Daniel’s “son of man” as a prophetic rendering of Christ, Towner’s two options could both to point to Jesus, who as the divine-become-human represents both heavenly and earthly beings and serves as a forerunner of the recreated humanity. Furthermore, Jesus is depicted in Revelation 1:7 as riding upon the clouds, perhaps affirming that, at least from an early Christian perspective, this figure was interpreted as Jesus. Whatever the case, an examination of the “son of man” figure in Daniel, while perhaps necessary for a full understanding of the passage, would still be complicated for a one-sermon interpretation of that passage. And whatever the case, even if the “son of man” figure is largely left aside, the message of Daniel 7 still rings clear: God is in control. Wisdom should be used, then, when considering if/how to include such an examination in any preaching context. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. For the purposes of the introduction’s story drawn throughout the sermon, the key to the surrounded army’s victory is the heroic, undefeatable general who comes to their aid. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Here, if it is timely and appropriate, the sermon may draw in apocalyptic language from Revelation that deals more directly with what an existence in which evil has been vanquished looks like. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Triumph because God will *conquer*. *Humble* triumph because *God* will conquer. Longman notes that in overall tone, apocalyptic works like Daniel and Revelation “radiate with joy and optimism.” Longman, 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)