DANIEL'S STRUGGLE TO STAND

Daniel 10:1-11:1
Key verse: Dan. 10:12

“Then he continued, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.’”

Daniel’s years of service to the kings of Babylon and Persia were nearly over. Daniel had poured out his heart in prayer for his people, the Jews, to turn away from their sins and give attention to God’s truth. And God had answered Daniel by promising him through the angel Gabriel that he has a plan for putting an end to sin and bringing in everlasting righteousness. Today’s passage marks the beginning of the final section of Daniel, in which is recorded Daniel’s vision of a great conflict that will lead to the fulfillment of God’s promise. Strangely, we never get to read about the revelation itself, but only about the vision in which Daniel’s revelation is explained. Even more strangely, an entire chapter, chapter 10, is devoted to Daniel’s encounter with the man who will explain the revelation to him. This is not an accident. It serves as a warning to those who are too quick to think they understand spiritual matters. May God help us to learn from Daniel’s great struggle to stand in the presence of the man how much we must struggle to grow in understanding and faith!

First, Daniel's fasting prayer (1-3). It was the third year of king Cyrus of Persia. The first of four decrees to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and the city itself had already been issued after 70 years of Babylonian captivity, just as God had promised. At this time, God sent one final revelation to Daniel concerning the future of his people (10:14). The message of the revelation was true and it concerned a great war. But we don’t know exactly what Daniel saw. All we know is that, after seeing this revelation, Daniel humbled himself and came to God in fasting and in prayer. Look at verses 2 and 3. “At that time, I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were
Most people, in their older years, have slipped into retirement. They are really concerned about future security, and count all of their money again and again. They also complain about all of their ailments, and how this world is passing them by. There is a proverb that old people tend to become as selfish and irresponsible as little children. Daniel was an old man, but Daniel was not a child. When Daniel saw the great vision, he couldn't understand it. But he didn't shrug it off or shirk the responsibility God had given him to bring the meaning of this vision to his people. He set his heart and mind to understand God's vision through three weeks of fasting prayer. At the end of the three weeks, Daniel was exhausted. He was also ready to meet the one who could explain the revelation’s message to him.

Fasting is often misunderstood by Christians and Jews alike. Contrary to many false ideas, fasting is not an opportunity to show off one's religion. Fasting is voluntary deprivation of oneself, for the sake of others. Sometimes, this is a very simple idea, and simply refers to giving what material goods we have to others who are in need. Isaiah 58:5-7 says, “Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” Other times, fasting is the physical aspect of a man's participation in the spiritual warfare. Daniel’s fasting was part of his earnest effort to fight the spiritual battle on behalf of his people, the Jews, and of all the saints who would believe in the Messiah. He refused to comfort or distract himself, so that he might give his full attention to God’s truth. As he had in his prayer for the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem, Daniel here takes responsibility for his nation by fighting the spiritual battle on their behalf.

Sometimes, we wonder why we have to work so hard by feeding God's flock each week, studying the Bible individually and in groups, writing and sharing testimonies, studying difficult passages in the Bible from
Isaiah, Daniel and Romans, and by early morning group prayer and personal prayer time. These things are labor that often hinder us from enjoying ourselves the way worldly people do. We must not fall into error by complaining to God about our life of mission. We must understand that a life of mission is a life of fasting prayer for the sake of being able to participate in the spiritual warfare. We are weak and easily distracted by the things of the world. But if we are faithful and do not give up, we will see God’s victory in ourselves and in our nation. Through our struggle to take responsibility for God’s plan of world salvation, we can see America become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, even in our lifetime. So may God help you to participate in the spiritual battle through a life of fasting prayer.

Second, The vision of the man (4-9). After three weeks of prayer, Daniel was standing beside the Tigris river, perhaps not far from the Ulai canal. There he saw a vision of a beautiful and terrible man. Look at verses 5-6. “I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.” The man in Daniel’s vision was magnificent, in appearance even like the Son of Man himself. No one has ever seen anything so beautiful or holy. But what was the effect of seeing such a man on those at the river? Daniel’s companions were all terrified and fled, hiding themselves. They could not bear the sight of this heavenly vision even for a moment. Daniel, too, was overwhelmed. Look at verses 8 and 9. “So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.”

Human eyes cannot bear to see heavenly things directly. Just as the sun is too bright to look at through a telescope, so the holiness of God is too pure and intense for us to comprehend. When Moses was on the mountain to receive the law of God, God showed him only his back. But it was more than enough to make Moses' face shine like a star. After speaking with the Lord in the tent of meeting, Moses needed to wear a veil because his face was too bright to look at. The intensity of
God's holiness has an interesting effect on men—it makes us sleepy! Daniel fell into sleep when Gabriel approached him the first time, and here as well. Peter, James and John all fell asleep on the mountain of transfiguration, so that Peter didn't even know what he was saying to the Lord. When the disciples had to engage in the holy battle of prayer on the night of Jesus' arrest, they all fell asleep, in spite of Jesus' rebukes. The holiness of God demands our complete and utter attention. But sinful human beings have no capacity to give their full attention to anything! We are scatter-brains, because of sinful desires. Only those who have trained themselves through prayer, self-denial and faithful service can bear God's holiness. Even so, it is beyond our capacity to bear. We must understand the true nature of God's holiness. We must not think of God's holiness superficially, as if it were a worldly concept. God's holiness is infinitely pure, infinitely bright, and infinitely good. Only those who have a pure heart can see the holiness of God. We are reminded of Jesus' beatitudes: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matt. 5:8). May God bless you to purify yourselves through prayer, study of God's word and obedience to his commands until you can see the holiness of God growing in and through you.

Third, “Stand up!” (10-14) Daniel was devastated by the vision. But he had to take heart and stand up. The man touched him and Daniel could make it to his hands and knees, barely. Then the man spoke to him. “Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.” (12a). At this, Daniel could get up, trembling. According to the man's words, Daniel needed to pay careful attention to what he was about to say. So Daniel needed to fight and listen to the man’s words. He had to stand up and receive the message the messenger had come to give him.

Look at verses 12-14. “Then he continued, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me 21 days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I
have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.” As we have already seen, Daniel was a man highly esteemed in heaven because of his earnest prayer and shepherd’s concern for his people and for God’s work to be done. As God has promised to all of his people, he hears the earnest prayers of his people when they turn to him humbly and do not give up. Nevertheless, we find in the angel’s words the surprising truth that the answer to our prayers does not come right away. There is opposition to our prayers. There is opposition in the spiritual world to those who would help us. It is really beyond our understanding. But we must know that it is true. There is a reason why we struggle sometimes just to stand in our lives of faith. It is because there is opposition. There is an enemy who does not want us to give attention to God's truth. So he tempts us and distracts our attention in any way that he can. When we want to give our hearts to prepare for the summer conference Bible study, message preparation, or to serve the guests afterwards, Satan hinders us and we fall into despair. We cannot see everything that is going on. But we must struggle to stand and pay attention to God’s message of truth. We must struggle to keep standing. We must know that God hears when we seek him earnestly, and will help us to stand in him to the end.

Verse 14 tells us that the message the angel came to give concerned the future of God’s people, regarding a time yet to come. Why did Daniel have to struggle so hard, bearing up under so much stress, just to hear a message about the distant future? If God has already determined what is going to happen, what difference does it make if we know it or not? God’s message to his people was not “tomorrow’s newspaper today!” God’s message to his people revealed to them the flow of history, yes. Most importantly, however, Daniel’s prophetic vision gave his people prayer topics and a prayer direction for the years to come. Just as Jeremiah’s prophecy that Jerusalem would be restored in 70 years was a challenge for God’s people to repent and seek God with all their hearts, so the revelation given to Daniel presented a challenge to God’s people to repent and prepare themselves for the great and burdensome struggle that was to come. Prophecy is God’s way of helping his people to know his heart and to find necessary prayer topics for themselves and for the world as a
kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Through the Holy Spirit, this gift of prophecy has been given to all those who live as God's servants. Acts 2:18 says, “Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.” May God bless you to grow in the holiness and power of God until you might share God’s heart and God’s vision for his people as 1 to 1 shepherds and Bible teachers!

Fourth, “Be strong!” (10:15-11:1) The man’s description of his own fierce spiritual battle, and the news that his message concerned the distant future again overwhelmed Daniel. He fell to the man’s feet and bowed low to the ground. He couldn't even speak. So the man touched his lips, and Daniel’s mouth was opened. He said, “I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my Lord, and I am helpless. How can I, your servant, talk with you, my Lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe.” (16b-17). Daniel felt that he was about to perish. But the man did not despise or crush Daniel, he touched his lips to help him open his mouth and share his burden. Daniel was having breathing problems. But the man touched him again and said, “Do not be afraid, O man highly esteemed! Peace! Be strong, now; be strong.” (19). What a gentle and comforting message! The angel of God does not despise us in our weakness. The angel of God esteems those who seek God earnestly. He will stand by our side and encourage us and comfort us so that we might remain standing in our spiritual battle. We must never look at ourselves and our weaknesses and despair. We must receive the comfort that comes from knowing the only God, and be strengthened to keep standing as his servants in this generation.

What difference does it make for us to keep standing? What difference does it make for us to know God’s heart and God’s prayer topics? Only God knows. But God considered it extremely important that Daniel hear this message. The angel was involved in a cosmic battle with the princes of Greece and Persia. They represented the power of Satan working in the world through those two superpower nations. But the angel stopped what he was doing to come to Daniel and tell him what was written in the book of Truth. We are so weak. But God considers us his precious coworkers and fellow soldiers in the work of advancing the kingdom of God. God considers our service to him and
participation in his work very precious. God will take his stand and support us and protect us, by his grace.

May God bless you to participate in the spiritual battle through a life of fasting prayer. May God bless you to see and know the holiness of God. May God help you to keep standing and use you as his coworkers in the spiritual warfare for the sake of advancing his kingdom!