

A Vision for Daniel's Grief

Daniel 10

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Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If you are a guest or a visitor, we're glad that you would join us this morning. My name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here, and it is good for us to gather to worship the Lord, to sing praise to him, to dine at his table, and to come to his word. And we are continuing in our series in Daniel, so if you have a copy of God's word, you can turn to Daniel chapter 10. If you don't have a Bible with you, there are Bibles in the chairs, and we project the passage. You can follow along on the screens. But we're in Daniel chapter 10, and so that means we're nearing the end of our time in the book of Daniel. There are only three chapters left, including this morning, Daniel 10, 11, and 12. And something that we need to be aware of as we're coming into this end of the book is that Daniel 10 through 12 is one vision.

So, we're in the portion of the book of Daniel where we're seeing visions, and we're being given dreams and interpretations, and Daniel 10 through 12 is the final vision. Now, that doesn't mean we're going to cover all of it today, okay? So, we're just taking up Daniel 10, but it's important for us to realize this because when we come to the end of Daniel 10 in our reading, maybe you've already read ahead in the book, and you know, in preparation for this morning, and maybe you've wondered, "that seemed very abrupt." Like, what about what the messenger of God is saying, and why he came to Daniel. There's lots of questions that we're left with. Well, don't worry. We will get to those next week, or maybe the week after. We will get to some of them today. Don't worry. But it's just helpful for us to be aware of this because Daniel 10 is really an introduction to the vision and the interpretation of the vision, okay? So, we understand where we are, laid some groundwork. So, with that in mind, let's go ahead and read Daniel 10.

"In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar. And the word was true, and it was a great conflict. And he understood the word and had understanding of the vision. In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris) I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude. And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground.

And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the

first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come.”

When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and was mute. And behold, one in the likeness of the children of man touched my lips. Then I opened my mouth and spoke. I said to him who stood before me, “O my lord, by reason of the vision pains have come upon me, and I retain no strength. How can my lord’s servant talk with my lord? For now no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me.”

Again one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, “O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage.” And as he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, “Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.” Then he said, “Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince.”

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can come to your Word, and we ask that you would give us understanding. For Father, apart from the work of your Spirit, we would be blind to your truth, and we would be led astray by our own ways and by the world. And so we ask, Father, that you would lead us, that you would guide us, that you would help me as I proclaim your Word, and help all of us as we are attentive to it, that everything that is said and done here would honor you. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

So when I was in seminary preparing to become a pastor, one of the things that was required of me, like many professions, is internship hours. So I had to preach a certain number of times before I could become a pastor. I had to teach Sunday school classes. I had to go on visitation. I had to present and prepare worship services, all the different things that I would eventually have to do. And so aware of this, and in preparation for it, one summer, the summer before my third year in seminary, Kat, Lane, and I, this was pre-Cole and Mead, they weren't on the scene yet, but the three of us moved to Greenville, South Carolina for one summer. And while we were there, we were going to intern at the church that had actually sent us to seminary. And so I went to Greenville, very excited about this opportunity. This is going to be amazing, right? It's an opportunity for me to grow, for me to learn what it means to be a pastor, to minister to people that I know and love and have invested in me, right? And I've got all this knowledge now. I mean, two years of seminary, I'm ready to give it to them. And so I showed up for work that first day, full of excitement, full of enthusiasm, full of anticipation. And the assistant pastor asked me, “do you want to go on visitation with me?” And I said, “well, of course, you know, that's why I'm here. Let's go.” And so we went to the assisted living center and we entered the memory care unit. We walked into a room with a woman who was part of that congregation who I had never met before. And she had no idea who we were or where she was. And she put her head on my shoulder and started weeping. I

had never met her. I didn't know who she was. I didn't know her name. She didn't know mine. Come to find out, she thought I was her son. And there she wept. And I didn't know what to do. That was day one. Day two, I was invited to sit in a meeting with the elders of the church as they were discussing a situation that had arisen. I wasn't an elder, so I was just observing. It turned out that a man in the church had abandoned his wife and his family and had moved to another city and was living with a woman who was not his wife. And they were discussing what was going to happen and how to proceed and how to love the family that was still there and the discipline that would surely come. That was day two. On day three of my internship, the senior pastor who I was working with invited me into his office and he shared with me that a friend of ours who was a pastor in another part of the country, his marriage was falling apart and his wife was filing for divorce.

By the end of that first week, all my excitement, all my anticipation, all my hope, all the joy and expectation I had, it was replaced with sadness, with wonder, with worry. I remember thinking, "God, what are you doing? God, are you still at work in this place? I thought that I was coming to be ministered to and to minister to others and to see you at work and your hand at work and your power. And where is that? God, where are you?" There was grief and disappointment. You know what this is like. Y'all have experienced this. Going from hope and anticipation, from experiencing beauty and celebration, to sadness and grief. Disappointment, right? Maybe it's after Easter or Christmas, right? We come and we celebrate the incarnation of Jesus at Christmas and we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus at Easter and the room is decorated and there's amazing music and we're reminded of the truth from God's word and we celebrate and we rejoice and then Monday comes. And we feel that post-Easter or Christmas blues.

Daniel's Grief

We know what this is like. We experience God's grace and his kindness. We celebrate it and then we're confronted by our sin and the sins of others and the brokenness of the world and our joy turns to grief. You know what this is like and I know what it's like and Daniel knew what it was like because our passage begins with Daniel in grief. Did you see that? Verse 2, "in those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all for the full three weeks." Daniel is mourning. He is in grief and why? Well, we have a little bit of insight into why he might be mourning, why he might be grieving by the time stamp that's placed on this passage. We're told that this took place in the third year of Cyrus's reign. Now, what we know about Cyrus is that in the first year of his reign, Cyrus declared an edict that anyone who was an Israelite could return back to Israel, could return back to Jerusalem and could establish their city again. They could leave Babylonian exile and so some of the Israelites left and you would have thought that as they were leaving, they would have been filled with excitement and celebration, right? That the exile is coming to an end. What they'd been hoping for and praying for was coming to a conclusion. It was a time to celebrate and thank God for faithfulness, his faithfulness.

However, if you read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which recount the return of these men and women to Jerusalem, then you know that there wasn't only joy and celebration, but as they returned, there was opposition. There was difficulty and hardship. By year three, when Daniel is mourning and grieving, things weren't going as the people or Daniel had expected. And so, with this background, most commentators believe that what Daniel is grieving, what he is mourning, excuse me, is the pain of his people, the pain they were experiencing as they returned to Jerusalem. Daniel is mourning the continued opposition. Now, there's some

interesting things that we should point out here, that what should have been a time of joy, became a time of disappointment. A time of celebration became a time of sadness. It was a time of grief. But what's interesting is that Daniel is mourning and grieving on behalf of others, right? Daniel is still in Babylon. He's still in his place of authority. He's got a relatively good position in the state of Babylon, right? And yet, though he's not experiencing this opposition directly, he still mourns and he still grieves. You see, Daniel is embodying what Paul would later speak of in Romans 12, when he says that we are to weep with those who weep. See, Daniel understands that the people of God are knit together in such a way that when a sister is in pain or a brother is in sadness, we feel that sadness. We know that pain. So, Daniel mourns and grieves for the sake of his people.

And as he mourns, he turns to the Lord. That's what we see in verse 3. He's fasting. He ate no delicacies, no meat or wine touched his lips. Now listen, biblical fasting isn't simply restricting oneself from food or drink to like work off those little pounds, okay? That's not what's happening. It's not trying to get rid of the winter pudg before swimsuit season. That's not biblical fasting, okay? Biblical fasting is restricting oneself of food or drink or both for the sake of depending on the Lord. We don't depend on food. No, instead we depend on the Lord. It causes us to turn our hunger towards God. And that's what Daniel is doing. He's giving up food and drink to turn to God in prayer and dependence and in his grief. And what we see is that as Daniel turns to God, God is not indifferent to Daniel's grief. That God draws near to Daniel. That's what we see. Because Daniel, as he is fasting, as he is depending upon the Lord, he is standing at the Tigris River and he has this vision in verse 5. "I lifted up my eyes and looked. And behold, a man clothed in linen with a belt of fine gold from Euphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of the multitude." Daniel has this vision of this man.

Now what's interesting in this passage is we have these occasions where these men are speaking to Daniel or interacting with him. And I will just say there is debate as to whether it's one man, whether it's multiple men. That's really neither here nor there. The important thing for us to see is that this is a messenger from the Lord. That this is one who is coming as a representative of God to Daniel and he is ministering to Daniel on behalf of God. And do you see what happens when he arrives? Daniel is completely undone. In the presence of this Holy One, in the midst of the grandeur of God, in the majesty that is on display in front of him, Daniel is completely overwhelmed. Look at verse 8. He has no strength. His appearance changed. He describes himself as radiant. This is funny. This made me laugh. Daniel, in other words, was like, "hey, I used to be this really handsome guy until this guy showed up. Like, I'm a good-looking guy normally, but now I'm fearfully changed." That's what he says, right? My radiance was fearfully changed. Literally, my splendor was changed to ruin. But he goes on. He says he fell on his face. He was prostrate. In verse 10, he was trembling. In verse 15, he turned his face to the ground. He was mute. He can't look up. He can't speak. In verse 17, no strength remains. No breath is left in him.

God Draws Near

You see, as God's messenger comes to Daniel, this man in linen, the appearance of man, comes to Daniel's presence, Daniel has no strength left. This is what we all would experience if we entered into the presence of God. Because, listen, we talk about God's love, and we talk about his kindness, and we talk about his fatherhood, and we talk about how he is near, and he cares for his people, and y'all, we should talk about those things. They are absolutely true.

And we shouldn't talk about them at the expense of the rest of who God is. That God is also holy. He is transcendent. He is completely other. He is not like you or me. That if we were in his presence, we too would be struck dumb. We too would fall on our faces. That when people come into the presence of God or his representative throughout the Bible, they are terrified and exhausted and weak, because we know what Scripture says, God is a consuming fire. His holiness is brilliant. And so, in his presence, Daniel is undone. And he is not left undone. He is not left in this state, because look at what the messenger says to him. Twice, in verses 11 and 19, he says, "Daniel, you are greatly loved." Now, I talked about this last week, so I'm not going to belabor the point, but I find it fascinating that before the messenger is going to tell Daniel the vision, before he's going to talk anymore about what he has seen or what Daniel needs to know, the first thing Daniel needs to know is you are loved. I'm about to share all this with you, but remember, Daniel, you are greatly loved. That's what you need to hear before anything else. But there is more that he says. In verse 12, he says, "fear not your words or your prayers. They have been heard." Verse 19, again, "fear not. Peace be with you. Be strong and of good courage." You see, the messenger is bringing words of love and assurance and encouragement to Daniel. Daniel's not left in his grief and his fear. No, the messenger, in verse 18, touches him, and Daniel is strengthened. He touches his lips, and now Daniel can speak. You see, in his grief, God is ministering to Daniel and assuring him that for all the sadness that he experiences and all the weakness that he feels and all the brokenness that he sees, that God is at work.

Remember, that was the question I wondered years ago when I experienced the sadness and brokenness of that place in my internship. That is the question we have all wondered at times in our lives, and what Daniel is telling us is God is working. He is at work. That's why Daniel need not fear. That's why Daniel can have courage, because God is moving. Chapter 11, next week, we're going to hear how God is working in the physical world, in the physical realm. But in chapter 10, what we're hearing is how God is at work in the spiritual world, in the spiritual realm, because this vision that Daniel is being given is pulling back the curtain and revealing the spiritual battle that is taking place. That's what the messenger says. Fear not. You've been heard. I have come, and then in verse 13, the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me 21 days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me. Then again in verse 20, he says, "do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come, but I will tell you that what is inscribed in the book of truth, there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince."

Now, this language of prince can seem a little bit confusing, or at least it was for me initially. Maybe it's perfectly clear for y'all, but as I was coming to this passage and I was seeing this prince, my first thought went to, well, these are royal people, right? These are the next in line. These are those who are going to take the place of Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander. But actually, when we look a little bit deeper, it seems that the princes of Persia and of Greece aren't human royalty, but they are actually spiritual beings associated with these empires that were opposing the Lord. Now, why do I say that? I say it for a couple of reasons. One is in chapter 11, we're going to hear about earthly rulers, and they're referred to as kings, not princes. So that's one note. But the second is, prince in this passage is speaking of not only the demonic or the evil spirits, but also the angelic spirits, right? That's what Michael is called, "your prince." And so when prince is used in chapter 10, it's speaking of either those who are on the Lord's side, like Michael, or these evil angelic beings, these agents of Satan. And so what the vision is giving us is a glimpse of the spiritual reality and

the realm that is often hidden to us. Now, as soon as we start talking about angels—actually, we don't have a problem with talking about angels, right? Because angels are on our side. But as soon as we start talking about, like, demonic powers and evil powers and Satan and these sorts of things, then it's easy for us to respond in kind of two different ways. One way is to just basically go, “uh, that was then. That was, like, the book of Daniel. That was the gospels. Like, that's not really today. We don't need to worry about that.” And we basically function like muggles. Y'all know what muggles are, right, from the Harry Potter universe? Muggles are those people who, uh, they're the non-wizarding people in the world who don't know that there are wizards and witches and magic taking place all around them. So they're completely ignorant to the reality that's around them. And that's how sometimes we function. When we basically said, “no, no, no, angels, demons, Satan,” all that kind of —we're basically being like muggles. So that's one way of responding, right? That's a very enlightened sort of way of approaching it. Okay, that's not a good way.

So then the other way that we sometimes approach it is we go, “oh, yeah, there are demonic powers. There are evil beings. There are evil spirits.” And we give them too much credit. So we acknowledge that they're there. But then Satan is behind everything. Every bad thing, every evil thing, every wicked thing. “Well, it's not my fault. Satan made me do it.” Now, listen, I think Satan is at work. And there are demonic powers. And there's still my flesh and the world that we are warring against. And your flesh. It's this trifecta that we are fighting. So it's a reality, but it's not the excuse for everything. Does that make sense to you all? So we have to acknowledge the existence of this spiritual battle. Okay, we see it in Daniel 10. We see it in the Gospels when Jesus casts out demons. We see it in Luke when Satan wanted to sift Peter. We see it in Ephesians 6 when Paul says we are to put on the armor of God to resist the schemes of the devil. We see it in 1 Peter 5 when we're told by Peter that the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. You see, we know all too well the battles and struggles and strains of the physical world. And we have to acknowledge and we have to recognize that God is showing us the battle of the spiritual world as well. That our battle isn't actually against flesh and blood, but is against principalities. And that is all around us.

And that's what is being revealed to us. And so, we could respond with fear, with trepidation, with worry, with concern. And yet, the messenger tells Daniel what? “Fear not. Have courage. You are loved and your prayers have been heard and God is fighting the battle.” That's what we see in verse 20. The messenger says, “I will return to fight against the prince of Persia. There is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince.” You see, what Daniel's being told, what we're being told, is that God isn't standing on the sideline. He isn't sitting idly by. He's not wringing his hands wondering which power is going to win. No. God enters the battle and he fights against evil and he triumphs. And we know this not only because of the vision that Daniel is given, but we know this because Jesus himself entered the arena. Jesus took on flesh and he entered into the battle. And he went to the cross and he defeated sin. And he rose again and he conquered death. And he is returning and when he does, he brings the final word of victory over Satan and his minions and evil and he will triumph forever. That is what is promised to us.

And so friends, that means that whatever you are bringing here this morning, whatever you are carrying, whatever you might be experiencing emotionally or spiritually or physically or whatever you might take out of this place or you might come across this week, whether it be sadness or joy, whether it's grief or expectation, we can have courage. Courage. And we can be encouraged knowing that you are loved, that God sees you, that he hears your prayers, and

most importantly, that Christ is victorious. That the battle has already been won because Christ has defeated principalities and he has thrown down the devil and he is victorious over sin and hell and the grave. That is why we can have courage. That is why we need not fear Satan and his minions. That's why we can have encouragement because God is one. He has entered the arena and he has been victorious. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you. Thank you that this spiritual reality that you have revealed to us, that in the midst of it, you have also revealed that Christ is the triumphant one. And so we pray, Father, that we would not be filled with fear or worry or anxiety, that we would open our eyes to the reality of this world and the world that we can't even see, and that we would put our hope in you. That we would have courage, not in our own strength but in the one who has fought the battle, who has waged war against spiritual beings and principalities and has been shown victorious. That we would put our hope in Christ. That we would have courage because of him and that we would trust in you. And so we pray Father, work and move. Show us again that you are at work and that you are the triumphant one. And we pray all of this in Christ's name, and God's people said together, Amen.