

Daniel 10: Behind the scenes – the heavenly battle

I think it is fair to say the COVID-19 pandemic has provoked a sense of anxiety, stress and sadness in a way many of us have never experienced before. One psychologist who specialises in grief said 'it is a time of collective sorrow', "It's important that we start recognizing that we're in the middle of this collective grief. We are all losing something now."

Many people are coping with individual losses, including illness and death due to the pandemic, or loss of employment as a result of economic upheaval. But even people who haven't lost anything so important as a job or a loved one are affected. She goes on to say "There is a communal grief as we watch our work, health-care, education and economic systems — all of these systems we depend on — destabilize,"

The crisis isn't just shaking our faith in those systems. It's upending our understanding of the world around us. The article I read continued to talk about the importance of naming our grief in order to start to come to terms with it.

In many ways Daniel is going through the same sense of loss. We are told that he has spent 3 weeks in mourning. He too is in the middle of a collective grief for the people of Israel. He too is mourning the loss of his people, his culture, his place of worship. Some have been allowed to return to Jerusalem but many are still struggling, and no one knows what will become of them in the future.

And so we find Daniel here mourning, denying himself of anything but plain food to keep him going. Daniel, like most of us, is not in the mood right now to celebrate. He has turned to the one thing that has not been taken away from him in this situation, the ability to pray to His Lord.

Chapter 10 starts by showing us the honest state of Daniel's heart. He has confessed, he has prayed, he has humbled

himself before God as he seeks God and seeks to understand what God is doing he stands on the bank of the River Tigris he sees a man before him. The way this figure is described reminds us of how Jesus is described in the book of Revelation and there is debate amongst commentators about whether this 'figure' is indeed Jesus, and yet we read later that whoever it was needed help in a battle and from this commentators concur that it therefore could not have been Jesus and was in fact an angel sent by God. some suggest it is the Angel Gabriel as it is his job to bring revelation to people.

Daniel is the only one to see the angel, his companions sense that something is happening and are overwhelmed with fear, but unlike Daniel, they cannot see the angel. Has Daniel's preparation in prayer and the state of his heart, his willingness to humble himself before God given him a greater spiritual perception so that when the heavenly realm breaks in, He can see it and others can't. I wonder how many times we too are close to the presence and power of God, and yet miss the message?

The messenger greets Daniel with the words, 'greatly beloved' or in some translations, 'highly esteemed'. This is the second time we hear Daniel greeted in this way and each time it is in relation to Daniel being favoured to receive a significant revelation of the future. God has seen Daniel's heart, he has seen how much Daniel has mourned for his people and how he has prayed to God for help and here he is assured that he is loved greatly. God has heard his cries.

Not only is Daniel told that he is loved by God, he is also told that from the first day Daniel began to pray, God had responded. God has heard Daniel's woeful cries, his confessions, he had seen Daniel's heart for his people but He also sees how Daniel has decided to humble himself in order to receive understanding. I once heard humility explained as 'not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less, in other words putting God in his rightful

place, ahead of everything else. And so an angel had been dispatched by God **because** of Daniel's heart and Daniel's prayer and his openness to receive from God. Prayer really matters!

But Daniel is soon to discover that when we pray, we enter a spiritual battle field.

Daniel has prayed earnestly and openly before God, and God has sent His reply via an angel. However, the angel has been delayed en route! Verse 13, says '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'.

The word 'prince' has the idea of a ruler or authority and this fits well with the New Testament idea that angelic ranks are organised and have a hierarchy. Jesus himself referred to Satan as the 'prince of this world'. These angelic ranks seem to include both faithful angels and fallen angels.

So, the prince of the kingdom of Persia refers to a fallen angel who is opposing the angelic messenger to Daniel. Daniel's answer to prayer was delayed for three weeks because the angel delivering the message was held up in a spiritual battle on his way and needed the additional help of Michael, one of the chief angelic princes. Michael is thought to be the guardian angel of the people of Israel and who is often associated with spiritual battle. Daniel had not given up in prayer over those three weeks, he had persisted in prayer and self-denial and eventually he had received the answer from God delivered to him by the angel.

One commentator explains: these verses show us that events on earth reflect things happening behind the scenes in the heavens. Things are more complicated than we might have thought. When we pray 'Your kingdom come on earth as in heaven' we probably assume that God's kingdom is a reality in heaven and we want

that same reality on earth, but maybe the prayer recognises that there are things that need sorting out in heaven as well as on earth.

These verses show us how both angels and human beings are involved deeply in one and the same conflict, and fight alongside each other. The heavenly hosts need the support of earthly intercessors and the earthly people of God in their conflict have the help of the heavenly host. There is a cosmic conflict being played out and our prayers matter.

Answers to our prayers may well be hindered by unseen obstacles. Prayer may be challenged by evil forces, so we need to follow Daniel's example of persistent and fervent prayer.

Daniel certainly did not receive a joyful vision of the future ahead for the people of God. The messenger reveals to Daniel that the battle was far from over. The angel is to go back into battle with the prince of Persia and then the Prince of Greece in the heavenly realms because each of these areas in turn will have power over God's people on earth.

Verse 18 tells us that the one who looked like a man touched Daniel and gave him strength saying 'Do not be afraid, Be strong now. The message translation says 'Everything is going to be alright, take courage and be strong and Daniel says 'Even as he spoke, courage surged up within me'.

So as we sit here this morning staring at our computer screens again enjoying being together at least in some way, but mourning what we used to assume as normal, I think it's really important to remind ourselves that whatever we have lost, the opportunity to pray, to really cry out in pain and anguish to our God, has not been lost. That God hears our prayers, and that we are given God's strength to carry on when we are feeling at our weakest. I know that there are many people listening right now who are carrying really heavy burdens and my prayer is those people

may know that it is ok to cry out to God in anguish, 'I'm not ok, this situation I find myself in is not ok.

Last week a Surrey man, Edmund O' Leary made the headlines because of a post he tweeted saying, 'I'm not ok. Feeling rock bottom'. Edmund is a divorced father of two, he is lonely and felt so isolated one evening that he said, 'there wasn't much more he could take'. His post went viral and he received a staggering 100,000 replies, messages of support and love. He was filled with so much pain, that he made himself vulnerable to society and cried out for help.

We too, can and must be honest and open with our heavenly Father because when he hears our heartfelt cries, he responds, perhaps through the care and love of others, but he responds nonetheless.

We cry out in anguish privately for our own needs, and we must also cry out corporately as a church because God wants to see our true hearts, what do we yearn for, what do we want to see changed in our community and our society? That's why we meet on a Saturday morning every week to pray and intercede for others so that God knows our hearts.

And this morning, through Daniel 10, we need to truly understand the power of our prayers.

Karl Barth says 'To clasp the hands in prayer, is the beginning of an uprising'.

Pete Grieg, the founder of the 24/7 prayer movement says, 'The uprising begins in us. In our thinking and motivation as we wrestle with the implications of Christ as Lord. When we clasp our hands in prayer, things change firstly because we get changed. But the uprising does not end with us. Just as great boulders of rock shatter by mere trickles of water that enter cracks and freeze, so in a similar way the unlikeliest force on earth – mere prayer – has the power to destroy the sorts of strongholds identified by the Apostle Paul.

Pete says. 'To pray is to engage in spiritual warfare. And because the dividing line between the spiritual and material realities cannot easily be marked, 'spiritual' warfare has implications politically, socially, relationally, emotionally, economically. No wonder there is such a battle every time we come to really pray and then, having prayed, to persevere in prayer until the battle is won'.

We know that through Jesus dying on the cross, and through His resurrection, we are reconciled to God and the power of death has been broken. But we also know that until Jesus comes again, we will continue to wrestle against what the Apostle

Paul calls 'the principalities, the powers, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places'. May we be reminded this morning that we must pray at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication. There is a spiritual battle being played out right now and our prayers matter.

Amen