

Introduction

When I was a boy in England I used to attend a Sunday afternoon boys Bible class called Crusaders. In these meetings we would sing choruses and then have a time of Bible teaching, and one of the choruses we used to sing often was to a hymn by Kittie Suffield, and had these words:

Slide

God is still on the throne,
And He will remember His own;
Tho' trials may press us and burdens distress us,
He never will leave us alone;
God is still on the throne,
He never forsaketh His own;
His promise is true, He will not forget you,
God is still on the throne.

And this simple message, that God is still on His throne, and that He reigns over all His creation, is the major theme and the take-home message of today's sermon from the book of Daniel.

Slide

Our message today comes from the book of the prophet Daniel, chapter 10. Let us read a portion of it.

Slide

Dan 10:1-11:1

10:1 In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision. 2 At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. 3 I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.

Let's begin by putting this vision in its historical context. We are told that this vision of Daniel's came in the third year of king Cyrus. This is important, because it means that Daniel has now retired from public service.

We are told in Dan 1:21

Slide

Daniel remained there (that is, in public service in Babylon) until the first year of King Cyrus. And it was in the first year of King Cyrus that the king issued a decree that the Jews could return to Jerusalem:

Slide

Ezra 1:1-4

1:1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: 2 "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

"The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. 3 Anyone of his people among you — may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem.

But we also know that the work on building the temple was stopped soon after it started because of opposition from the enemies of the Jews. So the third year of king Cyrus would have been a time of great discouragement, both for the Jews in Jerusalem and also for Daniel. Daniel's response was to begin a time of mourning and prayer and partial fasting, eating only vegetables and drinking only water for three weeks, presumably to identify with his discouraged Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. And we know from the end of this chapter that he was also praying for understanding. Why has the rebuilding of the temple been delayed? What is God's plan for His people?

The second thing we are told is that Daniel's vision came on the twenty-fourth day of the first month. The first month of the Jewish calendar is the month Nisan, also known as Abib, and this is the month of celebration of

the Passover. The fact that Daniel fasted through this time of celebration shows how seriously he took the need to pray for his Jewish brothers and sisters and for understanding of God's plans for them.

Side-bar slide

As a side-bar, let us imitate Daniel by praying for our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters in places like Nigeria, the Middle East, Pakistan, and China, where it can mean fierce opposition and death to follow Christ. We had prayer here last Sunday evening for the persecuted church, and we heard first-hand accounts of persecution and killings in Nigeria and in Kenya. Let us never forget our persecuted brothers and sisters!

Slide

Heb 13:3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Slide

2. The awesomeness of God's power

Slide

4 On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, 5 I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. 6 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.

7 I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. 8 So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. 9 Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.

Slide

10 A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. 11 He said, "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." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.

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. 13 But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. 14 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."

We have here a description of a supernatural visitor to Daniel. Who is this visitor? His description matches well with the description of our Lord Jesus seen by the apostle John in Revelation 1:12-16, and so some commentators believe that this was a visitation by our Lord Himself. On the other hand we read in verse 13 that this being was resisted by the prince of the Persian kingdom for twenty-one days, and that does not seem to be consistent with our Lord, who "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" Col 1:15-17

So it seems best to take this visitor as an angel, like the man clothed in linen seen in Ezekiel's vision in chapter 9.

But this leads us to a shocking conclusion. This vision of an angel knocked the godly man Daniel flat on his face. And if a vision of an angel could do that to man like Daniel, what then would a vision of God himself do to us? We know what it did to Isaiah

Slide

Isa 6:1-5

6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. 3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

and to the apostle John:

Slide

Rev 1:12-17

12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. 15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

So these godly men were both brought to their knees when brought into the presence of God.

So what is your view of God? Is it that of Hollywood movies, where He is shown as a kindly old gentleman who is far too nice to punish anyone? Because if it is, your God is too small! He is not a cosmic "Mr. nice guy" who is far too nice to send anyone to hell. No, He is the one of whom Habakkuk says

Slide

Hab. 1:13 "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong."

He is the one who is enthroned in heaven:

Slide

Rev 4:2-5

2 There before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. 3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. 4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. 5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.

And one day He will wrap up history as His son treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

Slide

Rev 19:11-12, 15-16

11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

So when we assemble on a Sunday morning or during the week, it is not (or should not be) to impress others with our Bible knowledge or our holiness, but to worship God in His holiness and to encourage His people by our presence and our words. The writer Annie Dillard, a former professor at Hollins University, puts it like this in words that apply to many liberal churches but are can also be true of us if we are not careful:

Why do people in church seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute? ... Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we blithely invoke?

The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews."

So let us remember that we serve an awesome God.

John McArthur puts it this way:

Slide

I don't care who you are. I don't care how good you think you are. When you stand someday to face the living God, except you be protected by the blood of Jesus Christ through faith in Him, you'll be devastated, infinitely beyond (Daniel's response), by His very presence.

Slide

2. The reality of spiritual warfare

We now come to the second major theme of this passage, which is the reality of spiritual warfare.

Slide

Daniel 10:13 But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. 14 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."

15 While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless. 16 Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. I said to the one standing before me, "I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I am helpless. 17 How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe."

Slide

18 Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. 19 "Do not be afraid, O man highly esteemed," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong."

When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength."

20 So he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; 21 but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince. 11:1 And in the first year of Darius the Mede, I took my stand to support and protect him.)

This passage gives us a glimpse into the real warfare that is going on, unseen and unknown by us, in the spiritual realm. Daniel had been praying intensely for three weeks for understanding of what God was doing with the Jews and what His plans were for the future of the nation, and he was told "Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard" But the angelic visitor did not arrive with the answer and the message from God for three weeks. Why not? Because "the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia."

This "prince of the Persian kingdom" was an evil spiritual being who could oppose God's angels; he was an evil agent, a servant of Satan. And he was powerful, since he could delay one of God's angels for three weeks. But he was not all-powerful, since the archangel Michael was able to confront this evil prince and allow Daniel's angel to go on his way to Daniel. And verse 20 tells us that he was a constant threat, since Daniel's angel says in effect "I've got to get back to fight this guy some more, and after that there's going to be trouble from Greece".

So there is a real spiritual battle going on, unseen by us, but with real and eternal consequences.

I think we can make at least two mistakes when thinking about spiritual warfare. The first mistake is to ignore it; to think that it does not exist or will not make any difference to our lives. But this is clearly wrong, in light of the biblical teaching here in Daniel as well as in the New Testament.

Slide

Eph 6:10-14

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Slide

1 Peter 5:8-9

8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Both of these teachings talk about standing your ground or standing firm in the faith. The image is of a soldier standing shoulder to shoulder with his fellows to prevent the enemy capturing a strategic position; they say nothing about taking the devil lightly or ignoring his power.

But I think there is another mistake that we can make, which is to have an intense interest in the devil and his power, and to attribute every failing and every sin to his activity. Now I have no doubt that the devil is delighted when we sin, and does indeed go about like a roaring lion and has tasked his minions with tempting us. But if we say something like “the devil made me do it” to every sin that we commit, then we are failing to take full responsibility for our sins. The Lord’s brother James wrote

Slide

James 1:13-15

13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

So what is the right attitude to spiritual warfare against the devil and his minions? Paul’s instructions to the Ephesians are a good place to start

Eph 6:10-18

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

Slide

16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

So our best defense against the devil and his minions is the tried and true use of the weapons God has given us;

- The belt of truth is truth of God’s love for us and of Christ’s death on the cross
- The breastplate of righteousness is the righteousness of Jesus which He gives us freely when we accept Him as our Savior
- Your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace speak of our readiness to serve wherever our Lord leads.
- The shield of faith refers to the faith that is God’s gift to us.
- The helmet of salvation, or the assurance and knowledge of our salvation. When we are certain that we are in Christ with our sins forgiven, we will have a peace that nothing can disturb.
- The sword of the Spirit is a knowledge of God’s word and the ability to use it to attack the lies of the devil. That is why it is so important that we study the Bible and become familiar with its truths and its power.

The last defense is so important that it needs a more detailed explanation. It is

Slide

3. The importance of prayer

As we saw earlier, Daniel had been fasting and praying for three weeks before he received his angelic visit. Why had it taken so long for him to receive the reply to his prayers? It was not because they had not been heard; the angel says to him

Slide

Dan 10:12

"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." So God had heard his prayer as soon as he prayed; the response was delayed because of the mischief in heaven that we have just looked at.

And of course Paul commands us to pray in Ephesians 6

Slide

18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Sadly many of us, and myself included, instead of praying "on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests," pray on a few occasions with small prayers and requests.

However, I do not need to spend a lot of time on the subject of prayer, because Jim Krouscas preached on this subject last week. He reminded us of four aspects of prayer:

Slide

- We pray biblically
- We pray reverently
- We pray humbly
- We pray expectantly

And finally Daniels prayer was answered. The angel who came in response to his prayer told him

Slide

Dan 10:20-11:1

20 So he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; 21 but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. And the angel then goes on to tell Daniel about the events to come that will affect Daniel's people, the Jews. But to find out what these things are you will have to come back next week.

Slide

God is still on the throne,
And He will remember His own;
Tho' trials may press us and burdens distress us,
He never will leave us alone;
God is still on the throne,
He never forsaketh His own;
His promise is true, He will not forget you,
God is still on the throne.

So God is still on the throne, and He controls history. Let us remember and rejoice in this wonderful truth as we go forth to love and serve Him.