

Touched By An Angel

SERIES: DANIEL: LIVING BY FAITH IN A FAITHLESS WORLD

In the early 1500's, Martin Luther wrote "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." The words describe a great battle:

*A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe -
His craft and power are great; and armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not His equal.*

*Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing
Were not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He -
Lord Sabaoth His name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.*

*And though this world with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him -
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure:
One little word shall fell him.*

Luther was a Catholic priest who found himself standing alone in a battle against the Pope because he believed the Word of God had authority over the traditions of man. In 1520 Luther was excommunicated from the church and started what we know as the Reformation. One of the marks of the Reformation was the rediscovery of congregational singing. Luther believed that there was a kind of spiritual power in the singing of sacred music. He once said, "If any man despises music, as all fanatics do, for him I have no liking; for music is a gift and grace of God, not an invention of man. It drives out the devil and makes people cheerful." Again, he said, "The devil, the originator of sorrowful anxieties and restless troubles, flees before the sound of music almost as much as before the Word of God." Luther designed this song and others as a battle cry against the devil.

Martin Luther understood that behind the battles we fight and the struggles we experience there is a larger conflict going on in the spiritual realm. The apostle Paul understood this as well. He wrote, "**Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places**" (Eph. 6:12). Paul knew and we should know that there is more going on than meets the eye; as we strive to follow and serve Christ we'll encounter spiritual opposition. This doesn't mean that there is a demon under every rock in our path, or that every time we fall we can claim, "the devil made me do it." But so often, because the Enemy is invisible, we fail to discern the reality of spiritual warfare.

We come this morning to the last section of the book of Daniel. The final three chapters of Daniel form a unit. They contain the last of Daniel's visions. Chapter 10, which we will focus on this

morning, describes how Daniel describes a spiritual battle Daniel went through to receive this final vision. Daniel had been grieving over the trials God had shown him were to come upon his people. He also had some immediate concerns. Verse 1 says this all took place in the third year of King Cyrus. This would have been a couple of years after the first group of exiles returned from Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. For some reason, probably because he was so old, Daniel stayed in Babylon. Within a few months the foundation for the Temple was laid. But then the work stopped. Daniel may very well have heard about this, combined with what God had already told him about their future trials, caused Daniel to enter a time of fasting and prayer. Verses 2 and 3 tell us Daniel fasted and prayed and deprived himself of normal luxuries for three weeks. It's in this process that God reveals to Daniel that there was more to his struggle than met the eye.

I. THE APPEARANCE OF THE GOD VV. 4-9

After three weeks of mourning and praying Daniel stood on the banks of the Tigris River. We don't know why he was there. Perhaps his work took him there. Perhaps he was on a spiritual retreat of some kind. But he suddenly saw a vision which he describes in vv. 5-6,

"I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold of Uphaz. His body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult."

This was an awesome vision of overwhelming beauty, strength and heavenly glory. Who was this person? Some think this was an angel. Others think this was a vision of Jesus Christ before he took on human flesh. I tend to agree. There is a striking similarity between this vision and the one the apostle John had of the glorified Christ in Revelation 1. Notice also the way Daniel responded in vv. 8-9. He says that "**no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to deathly pallor, and I retained no strength.**" He says as soon as he heard his words, "**I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground.**" That sounds to me like the way a person would respond to a vision of God.

Why would God give Daniel such a vision? Think about it. Daniel is about to get a look into Israel's future. That's what chapter 11 is about. And most of what Daniel learns is terrifying. He learns about an evil king who would again

destroy the Temple. Verse 31 says, **“Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation.”** With that about to be revealed to Daniel it would be appropriate for God to first give him a vision of his glory and power. God was reminding Daniel that despite the defeats God’s people would endure, He was still God; He was still in control.

That’s what we need to know, isn’t it? We need to know that despite what God allows to take place in our lives, he is still God. He is still glorious and powerful and totally sovereign. I think sometimes our vision of God is too small. It’s good that we see him as a tender and inviting Heavenly Father, but don’t lose a sense of his power and glory! I can remember growing up as a boy feeling very comfortable with my father. There was a lot of affection in our family and I could be myself in his presence. But I also recall leafing through some of my father’s photographs from World War II where he fought on the front lines. I saw piles of dead people. I saw that he taken part in seven beachhead landings before the age of twenty. And somehow seeing that kind of scary side of my father gave me confidence that no matter what I faced he could take care of it. Nothing was too big for him. That’s why Daniel gets this vision. That’s why we need to remember that our Heavenly Father is also a Warrior who no one can mess with and get away with it.

II. TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL VV. 10-21

So Daniel is left with no strength, his face is smashed against the ground, and he is in a kind of spiritual coma. Starting in v. 10 and extending to the end of the chapter Daniel has an encounter with an angel. I tend to think this was a different entity than the One he saw in vv. 5-6. This WAS an angel. Three times Daniel is touched by an angel and that touch is what gives him the strength to receive the vision in chapter 11.

A. The first touch: The first touch took place in vv. 10-11,

“Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. And he said to me, ‘O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you.’ And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling.”

The first touch wakes Daniel up and brings him trembling on his hands and knees. After he’s commanded to stand up, he does so, but he’s still shaking. Then the angel speaks (vv. 12-14),

“Then he said to me, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will

happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet future.”

This is really an amazing statement. First, he assures Daniel that from the the first day he started mourning God heard his prayers and sent this angel to bring him the vision. But then he explains why it took him three weeks to get there. He got held up by some guy called “the prince of Persia.” This was also an angel, but it appears that in this case he is a fallen angel opposing the work of God. We can imagine that a great struggle ensued between the two of them because it required the special intervention of Michael, the chief prince, the archangel, to help this angel get free to come to Daniel and give him the vision. This is a remarkable glimpse into the battles being fought in heaven. We don’t get this a lot in Scripture, but once in a while God pulls back the curtain of time and space and allows us to see what’s really going on.

In the book of Job we are shown a heavenly scene where the devil and his angels appear before the throne of God and God says to him, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him.” Satan says, “Job only serves you because you bless him and protect him. Take away his blessings and he’ll curse you.” So God gives Satan permission to take away Job’s possessions and his family and his health, and he does so. Job didn’t know any of what had gone on in heaven, he just knew he was having a very bad day, but he still never cursed God.

There is also that great scene out 2 Kings where Elisha and his servant are surrounded by a great army sent by the king of Aram. Elisha’s servant is terrified and says, “What shall we do?” Elisha responds, “Don’t worry, because those with us are more than those with them.” Elisha’s servant is thinking, “Man, this guy has gone off the deep end.” And then Elisha prays, “Lord, open his eyes.” Scripture says, **“And the Lord opened the servant’s eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha”** (2 Kings 6:17). In the spiritual realm there was a heavenly army surrounding and protecting Elisha and his servant.

There is going on than meets the eye. Before he got the vision, that’s what the angel wanted Daniel to know. Although we ourselves may never get a personal glimpse of what’s going on in the spiritual realm, there are battles being fought in heavenly places which we know little about.

B. The second touch: Daniel himself was a little overwhelmed. Look what happens next in vv. 15-17,

“And when he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless. And behold, one who resembled a human being was touching my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke, and said to him who was standing before me, ‘O my lord, as a result of the vision anguish has come upon me, and I have retained no strength. For how can such a servant of my lord talk with such as my lord? As for me, there remains just now no strength in me, nor has any breath been left in me.”

Daniel is rendered speechless and so this time the angel touches his lips so he could speak. But all he could say was he was so weakened by what he saw that he couldn’t even speak. Daniel is

really out of it. I mean, you would think one touch would be enough, but he's still in no position to hear what God has to say about the future of his people.

C. The third touch: So the angel touches him again. Look at vv. 18-21,

“Then this one with human appearance touched me again and strengthened me. And he said, ‘O man of high esteem, do not be afraid. Peace be with you; take courage and be courageous!’ Now as soon as he spoke to me, I received strength and said, ‘May my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.’ Then he said, ‘Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come. However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. (Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these forces except Michael your prince.)”

Well, the third time is a charm. Finally, Daniel is strengthened. Daniel is now strong enough to hear what the angel has to say. Before the angel explains the vision he has a few more things he wants Daniel to know. First he wants him to know that he will soon be returning to the fray to fight the prince of Persia. Meanwhile, another prince, the angel of Greece, is about to come on the scene. This, by the way, is what chapter 11 is all about. Chapter 11 has one verse about Persia and 43 verses about Greece. But here we see again that what is about to happen on earth parallels a greater battle going on in heavenly places.

But there is something else. He also wants him to know that, despite this battle, God is still in control. Notice he mentions he is about to tell him “what is inscribed in the writing of truth.” This book is symbolic of the course of future history as shaped by God. The angel tells Daniel, “It’s all very scary, but don’t worry because it’s all in God’s book; it’s all been scripted by God and in the end we win.” I love how he calls Michael “your prince.” That’s very good news because we have already learned from v. 13 that he is the “chief prince.” He’s the head guy. On earth, Israel looked like a little peanut compared to these other nations, but in the spiritual realm Israel has Michael! They have the head angel on their side. He can take anybody.

So now Daniel is ready to hear the vision. He has the strength to receive what God has to say about Israel’s future. I want to stop there and step back from this. You can see that there is more going on in our battles and our struggles than meets the eye. This is what Daniel needed to know about the struggle he was engaged in. What about us? What does this story teach us about our struggle? Let me suggest three things that you and I should do in light of this.

III. APPLICATIONS

A. First, we should be informed: This sounds pretty basic, but it’s a critical place to start. Don’t be ignorant of the fact that there is a spiritual component to our struggles. From this passage, what can we say for sure about this battle? We

can say this battle involves spirit beings with specific allegiances and assignments. There are angels who continue to be aligned with God and there are fallen angels aligned with Satan. These angels don’t just sort of float around and smile, they have specific tasks and assignments. They’re organized. They wage war against each other (see Rev. 12:7-9). We can’t say a whole lot more about it than that. We can’t map out which area or nation has a good angel or a bad angel as some people are doing today. We just know that there is a whole other world of reality that we can’t see.

This battle affects human history. It effects the course of nations. The kingdoms of Persia would be impacted by the outcome of that angel’s fight with the prince of Persia in the spiritual realm. Think about the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in the last 15 years. Wouldn’t you love to see what kind of spiritual battles were being fought over that one? How much angelic blood was shed to free countries like Albania and Bulgaria from institutionalized atheism? These battles also affect the advancement of the Gospel. I think of all the years this church tried to build this building and for one reason or another was unable. I wonder if there wasn’t some angelic swords drawn over that one. These battles affect our individual experiences as believers. Think about it: Daniel prayed for three weeks before he got an answer. Why? Because his answer was delayed by a fallen angel! Do you ever wonder why a prayer of yours isn’t being answered? Why do you have to wait so long? It could be something going on in the heavenlies.

Be informed - there is a spiritual dimension to our battles to stay faithful; to grow in Christ; to remain pure; to keep our families on track; to be a witness at work; to fulfill our ministry. I told you a few weeks ago that I had shared with our elders about some internal battles I’ve been fighting revolving around the pressures of preaching week in and week out. I told you about how they prayed for me and what a difference that made. One of the things they said to me as I shared is that there might be an element of spiritual warfare in this. And it was like when they said it, “Oh yeah, I forgot about that. The enemy would love to stop me from doing what I’m doing.” That doesn’t solve it. There may be other aspects to the struggle. But it does help me to know that at least part of the battle is on a spiritual level and I need to fight there.

B. Second, we should be in prayer. It’s clear from this passage that Daniel’s prayers had an impact on what was going on in the spiritual realm. In v. 20, when the angel says to him, “Do you understand why I came to you?” He’s saying, “Daniel, I came to you because you prayed.”

During Operation Desert Storm, the Iraqi war machine was overwhelmed by the Coalition Forces’ ability to strike strategic targets with amazing accuracy. Unknown to the Iraqis, the Allied Supreme Command had dropped special forces behind enemy lines. These men provided bombing coordinates for military targets. To avoid civilians, pinpoint bombing was required. A soldier would actually request an aircraft overhead to drop a laser guided missile. Then, using a handheld laser, the soldier would point at the target and the missile would hone in for a direct hit.

In many ways, this is how prayer work. Our prayers are the hand held lasers that somehow direct the spiritual powers on

high to hit the right target. Certainly, God didn't have to work it that way, but he has. Our prayers make a difference in spiritual warfare. That's why in Eph. 6 Paul concludes his instruction on spiritual warfare with a call to prayer. He says, **"With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit...be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints."**

C. Third, we should be encouraged: We can be encouraged because God remains absolutely sovereign over this battle and its outcome. God has a book and in that book he has written his plan and in the end, we win! Satan doesn't have a book! There are NOT two powers competing for control of the universe. Satan is not God's equal. He is a created being who's every breath is allowed by God. God is all-powerful, Satan is not. God can do whatever he wants to do; Satan can do only what God permits him to do. This is God's universe, not the devil's. Not even Hell belongs to him. God created Hell so he would have a place to throw him. God is everywhere at once, Satan can only be in one place at one time. To spread his influence he has to use one of his fallen angels. God knows all, but Satan doesn't. He knows a lot, and he is probably a shrewd guesser, but he doesn't know everything. Only God knows everything. We should respect the power of the Enemy, but don't fear him. We've got Michael on our side! Better than that, we've got Jesus! John said, **"Greater is he who is in you than he that is in the world."**

There is another reason we can be encouraged. Twice in this passage the angel calls Daniel **"a man of high esteem"** (vv. 11, 19). That term actually comes from the word meaning "to covet." In essence, what the angel says is that Daniel is a man coveted by God. When you covet something you want it; you want it for yourself. Whatever that thing is, it's special to you. It's an object of desire. The angel is trying to encourage Daniel. He wants him to know that God is for him and not against him. Isn't this what we need to know when we're struggling? We need to know that God prizes us; he covets us; he desires us. We are the apple of his eye. One of the things the enemy tries to do is accuse us. He wants us to be so encumbered with guilt that we feel as if God is against us and not for us.

In the book of Zechariah the prophet has a vision of the high priest Joshua standing before God's altar. Satan is there to accuse him. Joshua is clothed in filthy clothes, symbolic of sin. Satan is pointing to the filthy clothes and asking what right this man has to stand in the presence of God. But God rebukes Satan, and says, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he says to Joshua, "I have taken away your sin and will clothe you with festal robes." And so, God gave him beautiful new clothes (Zech. 3:1-5). The NT says this is exactly what has happened to us. We have been **"clothed with Christ"** (Gal. 3:27). So when Satan accuses us we can just say, "Get lost. I'm not wearing those filthy clothes anymore. I've got some new duds with a designer label! They don't say Calvin Klein, they say Jesus Christ."

In Eph. 6 when Paul tells us to put on the armor of God in this battle with the Enemy, he says to put on the "breastplate of righteousness." What is that? Is that your righteousness? No way! That's the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That's you, every time Satan accuses you, looking to the cross and saying, "The blood of Christ cleanses me from all sin. I am clothed with Christ." That's what it means to be encouraged.

CONCLUSION

What are you struggling with these days? What are the things that are keeping you from being the man or woman God wants you to be? There is more to that struggle than meets the eye. Behind that struggle is battle going on in heavenly places. You need to be informed. You need to pray. And you need to stand in the truth that through the cross you are highly esteemed by God. You are in his book and in the end we will win.

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