

A number of years ago there was a fashion for those magic pictures. **This is one of them** on the screen now. The idea behind them is that in among the psychedelic colours and shapes another picture begins to emerge. When I was at school it was a badge of honour to be able to see the hidden picture. I have to be honest; I have never been able to see these things terribly well.

In Daniel's vision of a man, we're being allowed to see not a magic picture, but what is normally hidden behind the Christian life.

Chapters 10 and 11 are all connected, they're all about the same vision and interpretation, but in three distinct parts. This morning, we are thinking about the man (really an angelic being) who comes as a vision presenting Daniel with a message about what is in Judah's future, when the people are returned to Jerusalem.

We're told that in this vision Daniel found himself on the banks of the Tigris River where he was met by an incredible and terrifying man dressed in linen with statue like features. He was described as being like precious stones and polished bronze. The description of him dressed in linen is similar to how the priestly garments given to Aaron were described. So here we have someone with a priestly function as well as having the characteristics of a warrior.

We see this dual role being played out in the vision as this man; this angelic being, ministers to Daniel strengthening him as he delivers his divine message, he acts as Daniel's priest. We see the warrior in him because he has been engaged in battle with the Prince of Persia, and the battle was such that he needed the assistance of the Archangel Michael. This was a spiritual clash of the titans.

So, what is this about, what is it that we are being taught through this long introduction to the actual message. **Daniel wrestled with faith and the angels wrestled to encourage faith.**

The first thing for us to learn is that this man hasn't just appeared out of fresh air. This is not a random appearance where Daniel just happens to be the recipient. This person or angel came to Daniel **because Daniel had been wrestling with and trying** to understand what Jeremiah meant when he said that Judah and the surrounding nations would serve the king of Babylon for 70 years. (Jeremiah 25: 9-13)

John talked to us last week about how Daniel's prayer was because of what he had been reading in Jeremiah. It was this determination to understand the scriptures and the way in which he was praying for God to explain it to him that resulted in this angel being sent to Daniel.

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 10:12)

All of Daniel's life in captivity it seems was marked by a prayerful searching for answers from God, followed by a response to that searching. The first story we read about Daniel was the request not to eat the king's food, an honouring of God above all else and then the prayerful response to the king's command to kill all the wise men because they didn't know the king's dream all the way through to his refusal to be moved from his daily routine of prayer, even though it meant being thrown to the lions.

Sometimes I wonder if we think the Christian life is a bit like rubbing Aladin's lamp. We utter a quick prayer in the expectation that our wishes will be granted. This is not how Daniel approached prayer – he struggled, he wrestled, he tried to understand by studying and learning. Daniel worked at his relationship and his understanding of God. The more he studied, the more he realised he needed God's revelation, and so he asked, help me Lord, explain to me Lord; God answered.

Folks do we wrestle with scripture, do we work at prayer – how do we do this? Certainly, one way is by coming to the Bible Study and asking questions as we learn from one another and allow ourselves to be challenged by scripture. Being here on a Sunday morning is helpful, but if all we do is listen and then go home and forget, we have missed the point. Wrestling with scripture is about trying to understand how this works out in our own lives – how it changes us and if scripture is not changing how we live, then it isn't impacting us, because we are not working at; we're not understanding it.

We have a role to play in our spiritual development, if we want to hear from God, if we want to know the answers to our prayers, then we need to be searching out those answers by searching the word of God.

Daniel may have worked hard at understanding; he may have wrestled with scripture and in prayer; we also learn that **seeking God in this way is also a spiritual battle.**

Daniel 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** (Daniel 10:12) There was no delay in Daniel's prayer, his heart's cry being heard in heaven. We need to take hold of that and remember that; this is important. Our prayers are heard by God, there is not a prayer that is not heard.

Having said this we cannot forget either that this there is more than just God and his angels acting in this world. There is a devil and his followers. Nor can we forget that because of the fall, because of our sinfulness that what we have actually done is hand authority of this world; authority over our lives, to the devil.

When we sin, what we are in effect saying is that we do not accept God's lordship over us, we reject his authority and, in his place, we are accepting the lordship of another. We are giving ourselves to another, that other is the devil. (There is no other way of saying this, it can't be dressed up as something less offensive. This is what sin is.)

This is why salvation is talked about in terms of redemption. To redeem something is buy it back, claim it back. Jesus' victory on the cross is our redemption because he buys back God's claim over us and by trusting in all Jesus has done at the cross, our ownership is transferred from the evil one, back to God through Christ.

While the cross covers all sin, it redeems all sin for all who trust in Christ and that redemption is complete and total, we still live in a fallen world. We still live in a world, that one day will be made new, and Jesus will be the ruler, but today and also when Daniel was seeing this vision, the devil is the one in power.

This is why this angelic messenger was delayed by the prince of Persia. **But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. The Michael one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia.** (Daniel 10:13) There was a heavenly struggle in order for Daniel to hear the message. Such was the struggle that

reinforcements had to be sent in the shape of Michael the Archangel, who it seems was still battling this prince even while Daniel was seeing and hearing this vision.

Very often we get frustrated when we pray, and nothing seems to happen. We question if God has heard us. Why are we still struggling with this one sin in one very specific area of our lives, when we have broken our hearts in prayer for its power over us to be removed. Why when we pray for loved ones, for their salvation do we see no progress. Why, why, why... for so many apparent unanswered prayers?

There is a battle going on. We are not told that in order that we would lose heart and give up, rather we are told this to encourage us to keep on praying, to keep on seeking out God, to keep on wrestling with scripture, to pray for victory, for more help – but also to keep going because we know the time will come when the battle will be won. This is why those times when we meet together for prayer are so important. Praying together is as much about God hearing us as it is encouraging one another to keep praying. That when we are finding it difficult to pray for whatever reason, then simply sitting in the presence of others and agreeing with their prayers strengthens us, encourages us, sustains us in the battle.

Daniel wrestled with scripture and in prayer. He worked hard at understanding God, who he is and how he works among his people. We need to work hard at our relationship, our faith but we do so while recognising that **there is more going on in this world than we can see**. And so, we don't give up when answers are delayed; we stay in the fight praying for victory, supporting the battle, remembering that ultimately the victory will be Christ's.