

Angelic Battles

Bible Reading:
Daniel 10:1 - 11:1

Catechism Reading:
Q/A 123

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Rebel forces are battling in the Congo.
Al Quaida attacked again this week - this time in Saudi Arabia.
There remains no lasting peace in Northern Ireland.
Communist forces destabilize the Phillipines.
Chechyna - more carnage.

War, blood, death.

It never seems to be far from the evening news.

As we saw last week, the warfare and struggle is found not only on the political front, but also in the spiritual realm. All across the globe there are conflicts between the forces of Satan and the forces of our Lord.

Satan and his army of spirits invaded God's realm, His good creation - doing that through the fall of Adam and Eve. They've set up their illegitimate regime here. They are an enemy occupation force.

Under the leadership of Jesus, the servants of God are striving towards the day when the forces of darkness will be totally pushed out.

This is a war that you won't read of in the newspapers. You will see little, if any, mention of it anywhere. And yet - it is a crucial war, one that involves all of us here tonight.

It is not a recent conflict, either.

We are given a peek at the dynamics of that battle and how it involved one believer in the Lord in Daniel

10.

Through that passage, and others, the Bible gives us instructions for our role as warriors for Christ here in Ottawa in 2003.

Let me begin by setting the stage for you.

It is about 540BC.

The nation of Israel is in captivity in Babylon.

Jerusalem is in ruins.

The temple is destroyed.

A whole generation of people have grown up in Babylon far from the stable religious influence of their homeland, having only a vague and weak knowledge of the Lord God.

God's people were struggling.

Daniel, one of the officials in the court of King Cyrus, a Jewish believer, was concerned about this state of affairs and the dismal future that seemed in store for God's people and their homeland.

And if the people were destroyed, if they disappeared in captivity as so many other nations had done in those days, what would happen to the promises God had made to their forefathers about a coming Messiah, about a time of glorious splendor when He would reign and push out all evil?

So Daniel does what he knows best.

V.3: "I had eaten no rich food, no meat or wine had entered my mouth, and I had not anointed myself at all, for the full three weeks."

For three weeks Daniel fasted, and as was normal with a fast - and as is alluded to later in the chapter - Daniel prayed.

Distressed, he intercedes for his people.

At first, nothing happens.

One day.

Two days.

One week.

Two weeks.

Still nothing.

And then -
on day 21 -
while walking beside the river, a vision.

It overwhelms him.
The answer has come, and chapter 11 gives the words of God's messenger to Daniel.

I don't want to concentrate on the words of the angel today.
Rather, it is the process that brought that angel to Daniel.

V.12 -
Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words.

Understand that!
It is the words of Daniel, the specific prayers of this believer that began events rolling in heaven. Without his prayers, the angelic messenger would **not** have come!
Daniel's praying is instrumental in the forward moving of the Kingdom of God.

Lesson #1 - ***the prayers of the believer make a difference in spiritual battles.***

And hard on the heels of that lesson, learn lesson #2.:
A believer's prayers and spiritual warfare are not easy long weekend entertainment.

This truth is taught in a very powerful way in Daniel 10.

The vision he experiences is very intense - no cozy, beach side chat with one of God's messengers.
Have a look at verse 7. The power involved is overwhelming, knocking Daniel senseless to the flood, and sending his friends racing away in terror.

Which is - by the way - the most common response when a person is confronted with an angel's visit.
Think of what happened to Saul on the road to Damascus. Or John, the disciple who was Jesus' best friend on earth - what happened when he was confronted by a vision of Christ?

Face down,
in the dirt,
as good as dead.

Makes you kind of wonder about some of the casual prayers we offer?
Or the off-hand way sometimes we approach the event of worship - how would it all change if an angel appeared?

Anyway - back to Daniel 10.

Here's a thought:

This angel - tremendously powerful, who sends men reeling like bowling pins - was held up for three weeks by enemy spirits.

The one that Daniel stood against in prayer, the forces that seek to hinder the forward movement of the Kingdom of God, are very powerful forces:

lion-like forces on the prowl, seeking whom they may devour.

If we were left alone to tackle those forces on our own,
or if we attempted to stand against the devil on our own we would be totally slaughtered!

I am reminded of an incident in the book of Acts, chapter 19.

Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, begin to dabble in exorcism after seeing Paul engage in this ministry in Ephesus.

They try to toss a demon out of a possessed fellow, and even mention the name of Jesus. Read with me what happens:

But the evil spirit said to them in reply, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?": Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered them all, and so overpowered them that they fled out of the house naked and wounded." (v.15,16)

So what is the secret to Daniel's successful prayer here?

Is it that Daniel was so strong and his praying so powerful?

On the contrary, look how vividly chapter 10 shows Daniel blubbing on the ground.

The secret lay in Daniel's prayer winging heavenward and connecting the weak human situation with the almighty power of God!

A single strand wire fence around a pasture is no obstacle to a herd of cows. They simply trample it and wander off.

However - a single strand wire fence pulsating with electric power keeps all the cattle inside. They stay far away from it.

The devil and his troops have no problem against human resistance. Humanity is simply trampled underfoot. But against a humanity that is under the protecting wing of heaven, the kingdom of Darkness is no match! The power of God tramples the devil underfoot!

That is the truth proclaimed in Psalm 46, as well - which we used at the beginning of the service.

The city of Jerusalem, the city of God's people, is not strong in and of herself. She is strong and majestic because God is present within her.

We are involved in spiritual warfare.

Every part of our lives is part of that struggle.

We are soldiers called to stand against the enemy army.

And, like Daniel, prayer that is connected to God is the key in deciding the outcome.

One person put it this way:

Prayer is the deciding factor in the life of everyone who surrenders himself to God to be used by Him.

What we do in God's kingdom is entirely dependent upon what we are. And what we are depends again upon what we receive. And what we receive, depends upon what we ask for in prayer.

[O. Hallesby, *Prayer*, p.157]

When you look throughout the life of Daniel you will notice that he always began his work with prayer.

There's a lesson for us!

To quote Mr. Hallesby again,

If the labour of prayer does not precede, as well as accompany, all of our work in the kingdom, it will become nothing but a human work, more or less capably done and with more or less effort and agitation as the case may be, but resulting in nothing but weariness both to ourselves and to others.

The work of praying is prerequisite to all other work in the kingdom of God, for the simple reason that it is by prayer that we couple the powers of heaven to our helplessness, the powers which can turn water into wine and remove mountains in our own life and in the lives of others, the powers which can awaken those who sleep in sin and raise up the dead, the powers which can capture strongholds and make the impossible possible.

[Hallesby, p.80]

Daniel's prayers are in his concern for the well-being of God's people, who were suffering in captivity far from the promised land of Palestine.

In some broad ways his situation parallels that of the praying believer today.

There is much suffering occurring in the world today. Believers are stressed and challenged. There is much suffering occurring all through Creation - witness what we've seen on the news just this week:

- a senile man bludgeoning his care giver to death
- a child murdered and dismembered
- car bombs killing innocent people as they slept

The forces of darkness have sunk their claws deep into God's creation, and they have no intention of letting go.

We are far from the promised state of paradise restored, the state when creation will be fully under the rule of God and obedient to it in His perfect way.

Far from that.

Daniel, the praying believer, was concerned about the well-being of the Old Testament people of God and their return to the Promised Land.

We today, praying believers, are concerned about the well-being of the people of God and our movement towards the Promised Land, the new Creation.

So we enter the fray as Daniel did, praying without ceasing, knowing that our prayers DO cause a shaking and moving to occur in the spirit realm.

If you leave here tonight and someone asks for a one sentence summary of what we talked about, you could possibly say, "*When a believer prays, mighty things begin to happen.*"

When a believer prays, mighty things begin to happen.

Please notice one other thing, though.

We **cannot** enter the warfare of prayer with a sloppy, do it quick and then move on to something else sort of attitude.

It calls for perseverance.

Spiritual battles are not easily won.

The final outcome is certain - that is true.

But there can be many detours along the way.

We see that here.

Daniel begins to pray and three weeks are needed.

That's how it is.

Sometimes hours of intense prayer are needed to unshackle a person from spiritual oppression or possession.

Sometimes weeks of prayer are needed for God's answer to show itself in giving guidance.

sometimes years of prayer are needed for wayward children to return to the faith.

Sometimes generations of prayer are needed before evil, unjust political policy is broken.

But persevere, Christian friends!

Our prayers **do** make a difference.

Look at the last verses of the chapter.

Daniel is told that the messenger will go to help Michael fight the prince of Persia (10:20).

We are also told that in the first year of Darius the Mede he took his stand.

Know the significance of that year?

That was the year Daniel's prayers were answered and the people were released from captivity!

One more piece of Scripture to consider. From Matthew 16, where Peter has just confessed trust in Jesus Christ.

Jesus turns to him and says:

Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it..... (v.17-18)

Do you understand what that means?

So often in the church we take a defensive posture.

We see news reports such as the one on CTV late news last Tuesday, stating that the Church in Canada is in free fall decline, we worry and we go into protection mode - focused on hanging on to what we have, preserving, keeping, status quo.....

..... rather than going on the offensive.

We become fortress church, hunkered down and waiting to be attacked.

We read "*the gates of Hades will not prevail*" and see pictures in our minds of the forces of hell attacking God's kingdom, and the kingdom repelling those attacks.

A comforting picture.

HOWEVER -

It's wrong!

Gates don't move.

Gates defend.

Gates protect.

Gates keep attacking armies out.

"*The gates of Hades will not prevail.*"

The Kingdom of **GOD** is on the offensive

NOT

the kingdom of Satan!

and the gates behind which Satan's army hides to try and defend its illegitimate foothold on the soil of God's kingdom will not be able to withstand the assaults of God's forces forever.

They will crumble, and eventually capitulate.

So - hear the word of God:

Ephesians 6 --

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.

11 Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.....

The passage goes on to describe the armor that the believer wears.

And then it describes how, once fully armed, the believer engages in spiritual warfare.

18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

Hear these words of God:

2 Thes 1:11: "*We CONSTANTLY pray for you....*"

1 Thes 5:17: "*.... pray constantly....*"

1 thes 5:25: "*....brothers, pray for us....*"

col 4:3: "*Pray for us....*"

Phil 4:6: "*In everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*"

We are, friends, in a time of great conflict. All across the globe there are conflicts between the forces of Satan and the forces of our Lord.

And tonight, we are called to arms.
Let us heed that call.
Let us take up our armor.
Let us prepare for war.
The gates of hades will NOT prevail.
Our God reigns.
Let us move forward - with confidence.

CLOSING PRAYER -

Almighty God,

Our faith is often weak and is so easily sidetracked by the small things of our lives.

Grant us a renewed vision and sense of purpose from this portion of Daniel.

Grant that though our faith seems tepid and our prayer weak, unanswered, and perhaps even unheard, that still you and your angelic host are battling on our behalf.

You remain with us.

Grant that so with undoubting hope we may be steadfast in our prayers, standing against the Devil and praying for the coming of your kingdom in all its full-orbed splendor.

So empower us to carry on as your soldiers in this spiritual warfare, persisting unconquered until you stretch out your hand from heaven to us, and raise us to that blessed rest which is there laid up for us by Christ our Lord,

In whose name we pray.

Amen.

[adapted from a prayer by John Calvin, Lecture 54 on *Daniel*]