

Daniel 10: Conflict in the Heavenly Realm

Exegetical Big Idea: Daniel is engaged in a spiritual conflict which he cannot see, and which he cannot control. And yet, he is engaged in it by means of prayer and reliance on God.

Homiletical Big Idea: **There is a spiritual conflict going on around us, and we are called to engage in it.**

Fallen Condition Focus: Satan wants Christians to be unaware or uncaring of the spiritual battle that rages on around us, and of which we are a part of. If Christians are ignorant or uncaring, we will not engage in it, as we are called to do.

Background: This chapter begins the last part of the book of Daniel. Chapters 10-12 are all one big part. In chapter 10, which we are looking at today, a being is sent to Daniel. In chapters 11-12 Daniel receives the message from the being.

Where we find ourselves is an interesting time! It is the third year of the reign of Cyrus king of Persia. It's interesting that it is the third year, because something significant happened in the first year of the reign of Cyrus. That was when he issued the decree to allow all willing Jews to return to Jerusalem and start rebuilding the temple.

Daniel did not return, he is still in Persia. We don't know exactly why he didn't return with many of the other Israelites. It could be because he is still in the king's service and the king wanted Daniel to stick around and didn't let him go. It could also be more practical than that. Daniel at this point is likely at least in his 80's, maybe older, and making the 1000 km trip was just not going to happen for him.

Either way, Daniel is still in Persia by the Tigris River when he is visited by a heavenly being.

Read Daniel 10.

Intro: Balaam's donkey.

I think one of the craziest stories in all the Bible has to be the story of Balaam and his donkey in Numbers 22. Balak, the king of Moab saw the massive mob of Israelites coming towards his land and he was frightened by them. The nation of Israel had come out of Egypt and they were slowly but surely making their way to the Promised Land. When Balak saw them he sent for a guy named Balaam. The idea was to give Balaam a lot of silver and gold and honour and pay him to come and curse the people of Israel. After multiple attempts at summoning Balaam, Balaam agreed to meet the king and see the people of Israel. So he saddled up his donkey and hit the road. While they were on the road, the donkey all of a sudden swerved off the path and into a field. Balaam hit the donkey and they continued on their way. Then they came to a narrow path between two walls and the donkey pushed to one side and started to crush Balaam's foot. Balaam again hit the donkey until they continued on. A third time they were going and this time the donkey all of a sudden sat on the ground and wouldn't go forward. This time Balaam got really angry at the donkey. But then something happened, the donkey began to speak. Who has ever heard of a speaking donkey? The donkey basically said "hey, I've been a great donkey to you so far, you think I'm doing this for no reason?" Just then, the LORD opened up Balaam's eyes to see what the donkey was able to see all along. There in the road, was a terrifying angel of the LORD. Balaam realized that the reason the donkey was acting crazy was that it was avoiding the angel of the LORD, and for good reason! The angel then spoke to Balaam and said "if it was not for your donkey avoiding me, I would have killed you had to come close".

Balaam answered, “I have sinned, I did not realize you were standing in the road”. I think the amazing the most amazing thing about this story is not even that God opened up the mouth of an animal to speak, but that he allowed Balaam to see that this physical reality that we can see and touch and feel is not all there is. There is a real spiritual reality that is going on around us, and in which we live that we often cannot see or feel.

There is a world view called naturalism that says that this physical reality is all there is. There is no such thing as the supernatural or the spiritual.

But we know better. The Scriptures are filled with instances where the supernatural is revealed to us. Instances like Balaam and his donkey, and this chapter that we are looking at today in Daniel.

What we see in Numbers 22 and what we see in Daniel 10 is that:

There is spiritual conflict going on around us, and we are called to engage in it.

Just because we often can't see it, does not mean that it is no less real and no less important. Just because Balaam couldn't see the angel did not mean the angel was not there! The angel would have killed Balaam whether he saw it or not.

There is a danger for us Christians that we might ignore the fact that there is more to the Christian struggle than what we can see or feel. Ephesians 6:12 reminds us that our struggle is *not* against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, and powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

(Verses 1-9): In our weakness, the LORD is strong.

The first and probably the most important thing to realize as we look at a text like this and think about the spiritual conflict that we are engaged in is that we as humans are weak!

As was mentioned before it was the third year of the reign of Cyrus. This was after the decree that any Jew wishing to return to Jerusalem could do so and begin building the temple. Daniel had not returned.

So what has Daniel been up to? Verses 2-3 tell us. He's mourning. Why is he mourning? In all likelihood he has received news of what's going on in Jerusalem. The building of the temple had made a great start, but was soon halted because of opposition. This would certainly explain why Daniel is mourning.

He's helpless. He's 1000 km away from the temple, and completely unable to do anything about it.

I think many of us can relate to Daniel here! How often do we see situations that we just wish we could change, but are in no way able to do it? We are weak!

But then he's met by someone who is definitely not weak!

In verses 5-6 a being appears to Daniel. By his description he is certainly a powerful being! As to who this is, some scholars believe it is God himself and in particular it might be a pre-incarnate Christ. It could be since the description of the being closely resembles that of Christ's description in Revelation, although later we read that he was detained and needed help by an angel and that would be weird to think of Christ being hindered. Others think that it is an angel, but the description of the being is not one we typically see of angels. Either way, we can be certain that this being is from God and in that sense speaks and acts for the LORD.

Then in verse 7, the people with Daniel though not able to see the vision, trembled and fled! Daniel is left alone to behold this awesome being. And look what it does to him in verse 8.

Twice we read that he has “no strength”, and when he hears the being speak he is flung to the ground with his face to the ground. If anyone could stand before such a being you’d think it would be someone like Daniel. The rest of us mere “normal” Christians certainly would be flung to the ground but Daniel? After all he’s been through? Yes Daniel too. Why? Because Daniel is just as weak as any of us. His strength is sapped as he stands before this mighty spiritual being.

We can’t help but be confronted with the comparison between these two parties. On one hand you have the old and fragile Daniel who is face down on the ground in fear and reverence and drained of strength, and on the other hand you have this mighty person with a face like lightening and eyes like fire. Arms and legs like strong burning bronze. Voice like a deafening multitude.

I think we’re supposed to be reminded here, that in Daniel’s weakness, the LORD remains all powerful. He never changes. In our weakness, he is strong.

[5 years ago I made Alana a chalkboard sign for our kitchen. It was a simple design with a white border and the idea of this sign was that you could write things on it, and as a chalk board you could erase it whenever you felt like it and write something new. Well the first thing we wrote on it was “God is still on his throne”. Pretty good thing to start with. But then, well, we never got around to changing it. 5 years later and the sign is still up, and even then, recently Alana tried to erase it to put something else on it and the chalk had been there for so long you can still see the words faintly even after being erased.]

It’s rather fitting! Think even of how much has happened in the past 5 years. The fact that that statement remained a permanent fixture in our kitchen, even today is a reminder that God’s sovereignty does not change. And since we are weak, that’s good news!

If you belong to the LORD, your weakness is not a flaw! It’s good! Because it causes us to rely not on ourselves, but on the only one who is sovereign over all things. God.

Daniel didn’t return with the exiles to Israel, is that going to hinder God’s plans? Not at all! Because God is still in control.

How do you feel this morning? Feel weak? That’s not a flaw, that’s a feature. That’s good news! Let your weakness cause your eyes to turn to our strong God. The truth is there is a spiritual conflict going on around us and we are called to engage in it! The good news is that:

In our weakness, the LORD is strong.

(Verses 10-14): We engage in the spiritual conflict by prayer and seeking the Lord.

How is it then that we are called to engage in spiritual conflict, and at the same time we are utterly weak in and of ourselves? The answer is that we engage in the spiritual conflict by prayer and trusting in the Lord.

So Daniel is face down on the ground and then the being touches him in verse 10 and causes him to get up to his hands and knees, while still trembling. Daniel gets some encouraging words in verse 11 that he

is loved and that the being has been sent to him, and he is also helped to his feet by the being. All the while still trembling.

Then we read this in verse 12: "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come *because of your words*"

Mourning was not the only thing Daniel was doing while he was still in Persia. He was praying! For the three weeks that he was mourning, he was also petitioning the LORD.

Now that itself shows us that prayer and petition to the LORD is a much needed response to our struggles, but there's more. We read in verse 13 that the being had been sent to Daniel, but that he was detained for 21 days.

First let's talk about who this "prince of the kingdom of Persia" is. I think we're getting a glimpse here into the spiritual realm of the conflict that is happening all the time. First of all, since he is actively fighting against the being that is sent from God, we know that this prince is evil, and that he operates in the same spiritual realm as does this being. So he's an evil spiritual force. But secondly, the name "prince of the kingdom of Persia", ties his actions in with the earthly realm.

Remember that the backdrop of this visit is during the time when God's people are trying to re-establish worship in Jerusalem, they are being opposed by earthly forces. Is it possible that we are seeing the conflict that is happened on the ground on earth as a mirror of the conflict that goes on in the spiritual (or heavenly) realms? I think so!

Think about the lawlessness in our culture. Think about how our culture has grown tremendously in rebellion against God's good ways. Think about how our culture no longer values human life, or the family, or even the gift of being made in God's image as men and women. These are conflicts that are not just happening here on earth. I think these are mirroring conflicts happening in the spiritual realms.

So how are we to engage in it? The answer I think lies in verse 13. The being tells Daniel that he was detained for 21 days by this prince. Why 21 days? Well it's not a coincidence that the being was detained for the exact amount of time that Daniel was mourning and praying (look back at verse 2).

So at the same time the conflict is happening in Jerusalem, the being is struggling with spiritual forces, and Daniel is right in the middle of it engaged in it by prayer.

Just to be clear, it is *not* the case that God needed Daniel's help. It is *not* the case that the being could not do this if Daniel had not prayed. Rather, God puts in the heart of his people the need to pray. He puts that desire in our hearts so that we may seek him.

Praying people are people seek after God and know they need him. Consequently, those who do not pray, do not seek the LORD, don't know the depth of their need for him, and are not concerned with spiritual truths.

Look at the whole reason for the visit of this being in verse 14. We read that he came "to make you understand what I to happen..." He came to reveal the things of God! Which then also means that Satan was desperately fighting to keep the being from revealing the things of God to Daniel.

Satan wants nothing more than for you to be ignorant or uncaring of the things of God.

[I coached soccer for the past few years for my girls who are 5 and 7. Coaching at that age is a lot of just herding the kids. It's teaching them the basics like how to kick the ball and not to pick it up, and to keep the ball within the lines, that kind of thing. At that age it's not uncommon for the girls to be mostly concerned with socializing with each other or picking flowers or showing coach that they can do cartwheels. There are always one or two kids who are laser focused on the game. When it comes time to play against another team, guess which kids get tired easily and would rather sit on the sidelines, and which kids would run the entire time desperate to get a goal. The ones who are not distracted by dandelions and cartwheels are the ones who generally are the best players and score the most goals. Now please don't misunderstand me, at that age the kids are having fun and it's ok to get tired and sit on the sidelines, but we are not much different as grown up Christians are we?]

Satan wants us to be distracted from the spiritual struggle and be content wasting our time and efforts on picking dandelions and doing cartwheels. He wants nothing more than for you and me to care only about our earthly troubles and for us to find it boring or unimportant to seek the LORD in prayer and spend time in his Word understating his sovereign work in the world.

We are called to engage in the spiritual struggle by prayer and trusting in the LORD.

In the previous verses remember that Daniel was with a group of people as he saw the vision, and he alone saw it. I can't help but wonder if it was because Daniel was mourning and seeking the LORD and engaged in the spiritual conflict.

I'm sure you've heard of stories of people who all of sudden, maybe in the middle of the night they are awakened, and get a sense of urgency to pray for someone. So they do and only later do they find out that at that exact time that person for whom they were praying was going through something at that moment. That's not a coincidence!

Satan would rather for us to think in those moments "that's silly" and go on with our day. Instead, take a moment and engage in the spiritual struggle. If God puts it in your heart to pray, which he does, then do it!

For the past few years the elders have divided up the church directory and we are assigned groups of people to pray for on a weekly basis. While there are days that I joyfully put out that piece of paper and pray for you, I confess that there are other days that I would rather put it off because I'm busy with something else. That's a distraction. My "something else" is nowhere near as important as my taking time to seek the Lord for the people on my list.

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Verses 15-11:1): **The LORD measures out strength to his people according to his wisdom.**

As weak as we are, and still called to engage in the spiritual conflict, thank the LORD that he measured out strength to his people according to his wisdom!

Daniel is again turned to the ground after hearing the words of the vision. But, weakened as he is, his lips are touched and he is able to speak.

Daniel is strengthened by the LORD here, but notice that it is not the strength to jump up and stand. It is not a measure of strength that makes him feel like a million bucks and that he can go on forever. In

God's perfect wisdom, it is simply enough strength to open his mouth and speak. Isn't that how God often gives us strength? Not for the year, nor for the month, not even often for the week or the day, but for the moment. In this moment, God deemed it wise and good to give Daniel just enough strength to speak, and what Daniel says is rather incredible. Look at verses 16 and 17. Twice Daniel confesses that he has no strength left in him, and no breath. Instead of saying "ok let's do this, I can take it" he rather acknowledges his utter weakness before the LORD.

As Christians we often have this weird idea that those among us who never seem to need any help and who always seem to be "put together" are the super spiritual ones. The opposite can often be true!

A Christian who never seems "weak" is not the sign of spiritual maturity! It may very well be a sign of pride! And I am not pointing any fingers here because I confess that I often hide my weakness for the sake of "looking" strong. I often forgo receiving help so I don't appear to be struggling.

At the same time, these verses ought to be an encouragement for anyone who is discouraged because they think they are not a "strong" as other Christians are always needing help and always feeling like they are struggling.

[When Alana and I first arrived here almost 8 years ago we were met at our new house by a big group of people from the church. We had a rented Uhaul which we backed into the drive and opened up the sliding door. Can you take a wild guess as to why the people from the church were there? To help unload the truck and move us in of course. Can you imagine if I would have jumped out of the truck and told everyone to step back and go home cause I could do it all myself? That would be a rude thing to do wouldn't it? Of course I can't do it all by myself! And the whole reason why everyone was there was to help.]

That seems ridiculous and rude, and it is, and yet how often do we think that is a noble attitude in the church.

Daniel was utterly weak here. If we are too, we are in good company. Often the Lord, in his wisdom, gives us just enough strength to be able to confess our weakness and rely on him for help. And guess what, help from the LORD often comes in the form of help from other people.

Well God does not disappoint. Again in verses 18-19 Daniel is strengthened. He is strengthened with a reminder of the grace of God. Daniel is loved by the LORD. He need not fear him (in terms of judgement). He has peace, and strength, and courage in the LORD.

Reminded of the grace and goodness of God, Dan receives strength. But the question is, for what? Does he receive strength to get up and do something? We often think of receiving strength in those terms don't we? And yet, that is *not* what we read in verse 19.

Daniel says "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me".

Did you see that? In God's wisdom, he gives Daniel a measure of strength, not to get up and do something, but just to listen. Now don't misunderstand, God gives strength for the ministry of the church for sure, have you ever considered that sometimes we are called to not "do" but to just sit and listen to the LORD.

I think this is convicting and encouraging at the same time.

It's convicting because I know for many people, and I would include myself in this, that there is a mentality that there is so much that needs to be done there is a guilt for not doing as much as possible. Or even still it's possible to have a mindset that if I don't do a certain task, then it either won't get done for won't get done properly. That's not "more spiritual", that's pride. That's a misuse of the measure of strength that God gives us daily according to his wisdom.

But it is freeing and encouraging to know we are not saviours! There is one Saviour who has already accomplished all that must be accomplished and he proved it as he cried out on the cross "it is finished". There ought to be no guilt in resting from work to be strengthened by the LORD to listen to him and be filled up again with his grace.

God in his wisdom will strengthen his people sometimes for works of service, but often he measures out strength not to do something, but just to sit and listen.

And we had better learn that because the spiritual struggle will continue this side of eternity!

Look at verse 20. The being is going to go and continue the fight, which means Daniel's engagement in it is not done either. And even then, Greece will soon enter into the struggle. And this struggle is nothing new. We look back into the past in chapter 11 verse 1. This being stood with Darius the Mede in his first year or reign.

The spiritual conflict has been raging since Satan's rebellion, and will continue until the New Heavens and the New Earth, but we do end with a note of hope. All that happens is already written in the Book of Truth in verse 21. Daniel will be told not *what will be* inscribed, nor *what was* inscribed, but *what is* inscribed in the Book of Truth.

We've seen from the very beginning of the book of Daniel that this book was a book about kingdoms. Kingdoms have risen and fallen, but God's kingdom will last for eternity because he has written all of eternity in the Book of Truth.

Conflicts will continue, in this world and mirrored in the heavenly realms. Weak as we are, we are also nonetheless called to engage in the conflict by prayer and seeking the LORD. And for the entirety of the conflict until Christ ends it, we receive strength measured out to us according to God's perfect wisdom.

There is a spiritual conflict going on around us, and we are called to engage in it.