

Jan. 28, 2018

Lesson 9: A Strong Faith

Scripture: Daniel 10:10-19

Context:

Today is the last lesson we focus on in the Book of Daniel. Coming full circle, the last chapter examined includes a vision and interaction highlighting Daniel as a servant of God. Starting in chapter ten, he stands in the midst of the Persian Empire (notice transition from Babylonian Empire) and receives a vision. As he and several others stand on the Tigris River, he alone in his group receives a visitor. He sees a man clothed in linen with a golden belt and a body that gleams and a booming voice. The others run and hide as they sense something is amiss and the man is left alone with Daniel. There ensues a vision and a conversation.

The conversation that follows is one that echoes the more apocalyptic nature of the book of Daniel. While chapters one through six focus on the Israelites in exile under the Babylonians, the later six chapters focus on apocalyptic visions and mostly come from Daniel. There is a revealing of what will happen to Israel and to the other nations around them. In the words of this messenger, Daniel is reassured of his witness and the messenger goes on that while Michael (an angel) are taking care of other things, this messenger has come specifically for him and the visions of what is to come for the people of Israel.

As Daniel looks to the ground, but someone who is like a human being touches his lips and Daniel confesses that he is tired and the vision has overwhelmed him. With a gentle touch, the one who looks like a human being touches him and he is given strength. He is told the words: “Don’t be afraid. You are treasured. All will be with you and be strong.” The words themselves invigorate Daniel and he confesses that he can go on because he has been made strong. In the following section Daniel goes to prophesize to the Persian King about all the things that will take place in the years to come, even the fate of the Persians and their fall to the Greeks.

The concluding chapters focus on apocalypses and the fact that as the world goes through kingdom after kingdom, God will still be in the midst of all things. The visions and words of Daniel point to this hope. There is a certainty that in the coming end of history with the certainty that God will be the victor in that day and that all wisdom and righteousness of the saints will be vindicated; the task for Daniel (and the readers) is to trust and obey.¹ It is a reassurance that people can do kingdom work and that God is with them.

Application:

How appropriate that the last lesson on Daniel focuses on his own faith and the gifts that he uses to serve God. Daniel is the focus and it is he who receives praise from God for his dedication and faithfulness. He is a hero, someone who later generations of Jews can talk about from generation to generation. In reading this passage for today,

¹ W. Sibley Towner, “Daniel,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, 1984), 148.

there are several pieces of Daniel's story that give us hope for the future and also remind us of the tasks that we have been given.

The first is the presence of the messenger. Much has been made about the identity of the messenger as well as the words trying to figure out Michael's identity. Who was the human one? Was it another angel? Was it Christ? And the questions go on and on. I think those questions miss the point of the encounter. Here we meet Daniel after he has been fasting and is probably homesick. The messenger is yet again, an unfamiliar face.

However, Daniel finds comfort in this messenger. He is encouraged by the presence, the physical touch, and the words of affirmation. He feels the presence of God from someone in a time that was blurry, difficult, and stress inducing. It has been said that "angels," much like this one in the Book of Daniel, primarily come to give messages from God. But in this case and in popular art, we see that angels are also sent to protect and to encourage. They are there to walk with humans in both the good and bad times. The term "guardian angel" is one that we are told as children as the one who walks with us even when we are afraid.

I think that is what God can do with us as well. While we like to think of angels as these spiritual beings that look foreign to us, I like to think of my own angels and messengers in my life who have acted in the same way as the messenger to Daniel. They come in all shapes and sizes and look different too. They are the ones who know when to encourage me, when to embrace me, and when to remind me that I can do whatever comes my way. They are also real people. Some of them wear fancy clothes like the messenger and others wear more simple garments. Some of them have the physique of the messenger with toned bodies and others are not as toned. Yet they are all ones who know the words to say to me and have stood and continue to stand with me in different times of life. Who are your angels that you look to in the good, the bad, and the in-between? And to whom are you an angel, someone that others can look to in the midst of life? I am hoping that you have those angels and that you yourself are being an angel to someone else.

The second thing that I think this text calls us to is having a strong faith that all will be well even if we cannot see beyond the horizon. One can only imagine the anxiety and tension that the exiled people felt as they were tossed from empire to empire. Even Daniel acknowledges his fatigue in the midst of the situation that he and the others around him face. We too can become afraid at what will happen next in the prospective worlds we live in. While I think that it is ok to have concern or different emotions about different issues we face as a society or church, we can also miss the opportunities where God will be at work in those situations. We might even be a part of those moments like Daniel. God will use us with our gifts and graces so that God's work can be done.

Any time we focus on saying an earthly leader is an answer to our prayers or whenever we say that the world is going to hell in a handbasket, we forget that Jesus is the one who has already redeemed the world. And yet, Jesus still has things for us to do in his kingdom. We are the ones as his body of believers to encourage others, to seek justice, and to lead with our gifts and grace both within and outside the walls of our church. Even when times may seem the hardest, or the road looks long and is fraught with peril, those are the times that God may be able to use our stories and our gifts the most. What is God calling you to do in times that may look hard and bleak? How can your voice and your gifts help in the wonderful Kingdom of God that is now and in the

time to come?

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