

Sunday 10th January 2021

Daniel 2: 1-30 (A disturbing dream)

Talk by Laura Polaine, Prayers by Margaret Davies

Good morning and welcome to St Johns online reflection. Today, we will be focusing on Daniel 2:1-30. First, Margaret will read the prayers.

Prayers

Let us pray:

O Lord God Almighty, we come to you today very mindful of our world situation. We need to trust you and feel your presence as we cope with restrictions again. We pray that everyone, worldwide, will take extra care to keep well and wait patiently for vaccinations. We praise and thank you Lord, for the fast development of medicines and vaccines and we pray for the smooth production and distribution to bring the virus under control. Thank you too for all the professional workers, doctors, health worker staff and all other key workers. Bless them with strength and energy and good health themselves in their extra hard work.

We pray Lord, for all who are ill. Especially bless Jon, Lucy and family, Emma and her extended family, Karim's father in ICU in Spain and anyone else we know suffering from Covid19. Please heal and strengthen them. Please bless Zak and Andy and Anthony recovering in hospital. May Nigel's son Tim and Val continue progressing, may she receive the physiotherapy she needs to increase her mobility. We thank you that healing is happening for Lorraine and Sue. We pray Sue will be able to cope with side effects. Comfort those who are grieving and strengthen the frail and elderly.

O Lord, our Heavenly Father, we bring to you our concerns for the other situations in the world. The awful political disaster in America. We pray for a return to peaceful democracy and common sense, during the next few weeks. Please give increasing wisdom and ability to the new administration to heal division and the virus.

We pray Lord, that you will lead all nations to righteousness and peace. Where there are wars, conflicts, suffering and poverty, please restore godly and quiet government. Bless those who are persecuted for their faith with courage, and may people of faith in you Lord, that is your worldwide church, be enabled to spread justice, unity and concord.

Lord God, we pray too for the mission you gave the church to go to all nations, preaching the gospel. Especially we pray for Jason and Tracey Day in Thailand working with families and locals in a Buddhist culture. Bless other mission partners and church

fellowships everywhere with your Holy Spirit's power to carry out your commission to us.

We pray, Lord for St John's and Holy Trinity's ministry here in Penge. Bless our merger with your Spirit for wisdom in organising and especially for the right new vicar to be appointed. Thank you for our church fellowships, our wardens and leaders and PCC members for all the hard work they do. We pray for all the activities, particularly the Christians Against Poverty Centre, the Food Bank, Living Well, The Church School, and Amaze Penge. We pray too for the Alpha course starting soon. For more people to join in, for the leaders and helpers. Bless them all with your Spirit to bring your love and saving grace to our community.

A prayer for this New Year, especially with the world's needs in mind:

Lord, you are Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Our world has tilted on its axis and thrown us off our feet: as this year turns, our hearts are muddled with anxiety and hope, faith and fear. Settle us as you calmed the raging storm on Galilee, that we may share this peace with those who are swamped. May our communities find healing and unity, our nation be shaped more fully in the character of Jesus, as we find our strength and purpose again. For His glory we pray. Amen.

Let us bring all our prayers together with the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen

Reading

Our reading today is taken from Daniel, chapter 2 verses 1-30 - New International Version (NIV)

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

2 In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. ² So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, ³ he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means."

⁴ Then the astrologers answered the king, "May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it."

⁵The king replied to the astrologers, “This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. ⁶But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me.”

⁷Once more they replied, “Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it.”

⁸Then the king answered, “I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: ⁹If you do not tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me.”

¹⁰The astrologers answered the king, “There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. ¹¹What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans.”

¹²This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. ¹³So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.

¹⁴When Arioch, the commander of the king’s guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. ¹⁵He asked the king’s officer, “Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?” Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. ¹⁶At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.

¹⁷Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ¹⁸He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁹During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven ²⁰and said:

“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;
wisdom and power are his.

²¹He changes times and seasons;
he deposes kings and raises up others.

He gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to the discerning.

²²He reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what lies in darkness,
and light dwells with him.

²³ I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors:
You have given me wisdom and power,
you have made known to me what we asked of you,
you have made known to us the dream of the king.”

Daniel Interprets the Dream

²⁴ Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, “Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him.”

²⁵ Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, “I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means.”

²⁶ The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), “Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?”

²⁷ Daniel replied, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, ²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you were lying in bed are these:

²⁹ “As Your Majesty was lying there, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. ³⁰ As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive, but so that Your Majesty may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.

Talk

The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar has had a disturbing dream. In the ancient world dreams were considered messages from the gods on future events. It was important for the dreams to be interpreted, as a king’s dream had significance for the nation as a whole, and once interpreters such as astrologers had given an interpretation, a king could prepare for the expected events to happen, or look to counteract them. So king Nebuchadnezzar summoned his advisers ‘the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers’ to give the meaning of his dream.

Whilst it was not unusual to ask for dreams to be interpreted we see here in the passage that the king is not only asking for an interpretation but for his advisers to give the content of the dream, and further threatens them if they do not; in verse 5 - This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great

honour. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me'. When the advisers ask again for the king to tell them his dream first in order for them to interpret the king suggests they are trying to trick him, and it sometimes may have been the case as advisers could use their skills for political gain and influence. However, when the advisers say it is impossible to be done, the king's response is extreme in ordering the execution of all wise men.

Daniel and his three friends would also be included in this execution order. As we learned from last week in Chapter 1, Daniel and his friends; Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were foreigners in Babylon. They were amongst those taken from Judah in approx. 605 BC when Judah was defeated by the Babylonians. A few young Jewish men were taken hostage, to break down their convictions and to be trained in the ways of a Babylonian. This would give an example of the power and authority of the king Nebuchadnezzar over the people of Judah.

So Daniel was at a crisis point, yet he calmly responds 'with wisdom and tact', in asking Arioch the commander of the king's guard, to understand the reason for the execution order. Daniel then demonstrates remarkable faith in God in going to see the very king who had ordered his death, he does not show fear, but is confident believing God would tell him all the king wanted to know. If we were in a similar situation, how might we respond? Daniel just asks the king to give him time so he may interpret the dream. Having asked he then goes to his three friends to pray to God. Daniel could have prayed on his own, but instead he met with his trusted friends who also believed in God's power and prayed together. In verse 18 'He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon'. When we go through difficult times, and especially with all the challenges we face with Covid, we also have the opportunity, to reach out to trusted friends....it may be through our homegroups or with just one or two. The example here shown by Daniel in his situation is prayer verses panic.

God then answers Daniel in verse 19; 'During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision,' and Daniel's response... is to immediately rush to the king to recount the vision? This could perhaps be a natural response when your life is on the line, literally, but no, Daniel's response is to praise God, in the words that have sometimes been referred to as Daniel's psalm: and begins with 'Blessed be the name of God, forever and ever. He knows all, does all: He changes the seasons and guides history'. Daniel first took time to give the credit that belonged to God. As we reflect on when God answers our prayers do we always acknowledge, and thank him, or do we just continue on in the excitement of the answer. Whilst Daniel's answer was immediate, not all answers are, which may make it harder for us to remember. One way to help with this is to make a note of them and to look back at them.

When Daniel does go to the king to tell him and interpret the dream, we see in verse 27 that he makes it clear that it is God that has given him the vision, rather than from his

own strength. 'No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come'.

We can identify two key themes from this passage that of power and wisdom. On the one hand Nebuchadnezzar is king and on a human plane has power, yet we learn he is fearful and insecure; his spirit is agitated by his dream, and could be said he has spiritual blindness. The intellectuals, the astrologers etc at court are consulted for their wisdom, yet they display helplessness and hopelessness as their gods cannot provide the content of the dream, as in their response in verse 11 'What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans'. The advisers by admitting that their gods did not 'live here among people' betrayed their concept of gods.

In contrast to this, Daniel's God does live among humans, and does exactly what the advisers say was impossible. Israel's God is not only the high and Holy God whose glory fills the heavens, but also the God who dwells with those of a humble and contrite heart (Isaiah 57:15). Hope is brought by the power of God through Daniel's faith. Daniel shares with the king that God has revealed the interpretation to show him that the God of Israel controlled future events, and so the king would become aware of what was coming. It also showed that God was not only the God of Israel. Daniel and his friends were in a foreign land under difficult circumstances being held hostage, away from their families and loved ones, and their life is threatened, yet they didn't give up, their faith remained strong in their belief of the power of God. We can take encouragement from their example in our challenging times. Through their belief, they also saved the wise men of Babylon.

It was only the wisdom of God that could reveal what the dream was and meant for the future. Daniel shares that only God's wisdom can reveal the mysteries of life. Human wisdom falls short. In the New Testament we learn more about wisdom through the work of Paul. Whilst Paul grew up he studied under a Rabbi to be a good follower of God, but he rejected Christ. According to Paul's own Testimony God opened his eyes so that he saw the source of true wisdom, God himself. In 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 it says 'My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power'.

Daniel could interpret the dream not through his own strength, but through the power and wisdom of God, and he was able to receive this wisdom, because he had a relationship with God. Daniel as did Paul realised just this that true wisdom comes not from years of reading or even living life, rather true wisdom is the result of a relationship with the God who created and rules over the world. Wisdom is not a lesson to be learned but a relationship to be engaged. In the New Testament the apostle chosen by God to testify to great acts of redemption could speak more precisely than

Daniel. If asked about the source of wisdom Paul would say Jesus Christ. 'For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him, but we have the mind of Christ..... Today, we have a relationship with Jesus Christ, God's own divine Son, in whom 'are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'. (Colossians 2:3). In Corinthians we see Jesus is wisdom himself (1 Cor. 1:30), 'It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption'. For us to be wise is to be united with Jesus, and understanding this helps us understand Daniel's passage to our lives today.

As we summarise what are some key takeaways? Nicky Gumbel in the Bible In One Year book mentions four things: i) have faith in God, ii) know the power of prayer, iii) combine prayer with action, and iv) learn to recognize God's voice:

1. **Have faith in God** – Daniel believed God would speak to him, and God will speak to us. God works through his people. Daniel through a vision learned what the dream was about and its interpretation. In daily life we face many almost impossible situations that would be hopeless if we had to handle them with our limited strength. But God specialises in working through us to achieve the impossible.
2. **Know the power of prayer** – Daniel requested a little time and then he prayed with his friends to pray to the God of heaven for mercy in solving the mystery. I am reminded here of the verse by Lord Tennyson – that more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. God reveals mysteries /the impossible.
3. **Combine prayer with action** – Daniel went to see Nebuchadnezzar and spoke to him with wisdom and tact. We are encouraged to ask God for his wisdom, as in James (1:5) it says: 'If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you'.
4. **Learn to recognise God's voice** - When God spoke to Daniel in a vision he was so completely certain he was able to thank and praise him in advance of sharing it with the king 'Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever, wisdom and power are his... I thank and praise you, O God' (v20, 23).

We are called to live life in a troubled and confusing world in relationship with Jesus Christ. We gain our wisdom in conversation with him. And how do we converse with Christ? - Through prayer and reading his Word. Through prayer we enhance our relationship with him through praise, and we draw on his wisdom through sharing our problems and confusion. We then listen to his answer as he speaks to us through the bible. As we learn we are more able to see life through the eyes of Christ. God in his grace will not only reveal things to us, but also give us the wisdom and power to understand and deal with our situations.

Let us Pray:

Lord Jesus we thank you that whilst things may seem impossible, you are at work in our lives. Thank you for the example of Daniel of his faith and belief in you. Help us to seek you first, as our friend and savior, to put our hope and trust in you, and like Daniel to

put our faith in to action, not through our own strength, but through the strength and wisdom you give us, for your praise and glory, Amen.

Closing Prayer: (Romans 15:13)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,
so that you may overflow with hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.