

THE OTHER SIDE OF PRAYER

by Ray C. Stedman

In the tenth chapter of the book of Daniel we turn from prophecy to a study on prayer. Some may feel a bit let down by that, for prophecy is very exciting. There are many today who are furiously reading Jeane Dixon and Edgar Cayce and other modern "prophets" to see if California is really going to slide off into the ocean this month. Some of you are hoping it happens before the fifteenth, when you have to pay your income tax! But in many people's minds, compared with prophecy, prayer is rather dull and prosaic -- unless, of course, California does begin to slide! Then we will find great interest in prayer meetings.

In the tenth chapter of Daniel, Daniel calls a prayer meeting. And he calls it for the same reason that we call prayer meetings -- because he is in trouble. This what he says:

In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks. {Dan 10:2-3 RSV}

That sounds almost like he was observing Lent. He had given up all delicacies, all special desserts, low caloric, as well as any other kind. He had not eaten any meat for three weeks, or had drunk no wine. He had not even taken a bath for three weeks, as is suggested by the words, "nor did I anoint myself at all." Why did he do this? It was because he was troubled. We give up things because we want to win favor with God (we think). We celebrate Lent because we think it gives us additional stature in God's sight. Even then we tend to give up things we are not doing anyhow, such as wearing overshoes in bed, or eating catsup on ice cream. Many years ago I gave up giving things for Lent and so have had no trouble with it since. But the prophet Daniel gave up things because he was deeply troubled and wanted to show to others the depth of his concern. He stopped eating the foods that he would normally eat in order to give himself to prayer and partial fasting through a three weeks' period.

He tells us what he was troubled about in the opening verse of the chapter.

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar. And the word was true, and it was a great conflict. And he understood the word and had understanding of the vision. {Dan 10:1 RSV}

The date in this first verse is very significant. This word or vision came to Daniel in the third year of Cyrus king of Persia. That meant it came right at the time the prophet Jeremiah had predicted when the seventy years during which the people of Israel would be held captive was up. The seventy years had been concluded at this time, and yet nothing was happening. The people of Israel were showing no signs of leaving Babylon. When they were in Palestine they had been an agricultural people; they kept herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. But when they were captured and taken to Babylon, they could no longer do that so they turned from a nation of sheepkeepers to a nation of shopkeepers. They had founded Macy's, Gimbel's, and the Emporium of Babylon and they were making so much money that many of them did not have any intention of going back to Palestine. But Daniel knew that it was God's program for his people to return and that they could never find any blessing or fulfillment of the great promises God had made this nation unless they returned to Palestine.

So Daniel was greatly concerned about this. He gathered some of his friends together, as we will see later on in the chapter, and called a prayer meeting in order to lay hold of God to stir up his people to return to the land of Palestine. Doubtless they came together with long faces and deep concern to pray together. But as they were praying an amazing thing happened. Daniel says,

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month as I was standing on the bank of the great river, that is, the Tigris, I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with gold of Uphaz. His body was like beryl, his face

like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the noise of a multitude.
{Dan 10:4-6 RSV}

What do you think would happen at your prayer meeting if something like that happened? It would really turn the place on, wouldn't it? That must have happened also to Daniel and his friends. Here they were praying together in a rather dull prayer meeting by the river, but suddenly there stood in their midst this amazing figure whose appearance was as Daniel describes it here. Who can this be?

It immediately makes one think of the experience John the Apostle had on the isle of Patmos which he tells us of in the opening words of the book of Revelation. Let me read them to you and you can see how similar his experience was. John says,

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like the son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. {Rev 1:12-16 RSV}

To Daniel, alongside the Tigris river and to John on the island of Patmos, many centuries later, as they were praying, the curtain dropped that separated them from the invisible spiritual kingdom and they were able to see the very One to whom they had been speaking in prayer. Now that Person was there all the time -- it was not that he suddenly appeared -- but Daniel and his friends could not see him until the curtain suddenly dropped and their eyes were opened. They then saw the invisible world of spiritual beings around them and especially this great figure whose eyes were like flaming torches and whose face shone like the sun in its strength. Actually, if we can equate this figure as one whom Daniel and John both saw, it was the Lord Jesus Christ revealed to them in this marvelous way, unveiling the glory and majesty of his being.

There is a similar story in Second Kings, Chapter 6, concerning Elisha the prophet. Elisha and his servant were in the little city of Dothan in Palestine, and the king of Syria was angry with Elisha. He sent down a great army by night, when Elisha was asleep, and surrounded the city. In the morning when the servant of Elisha woke and saw the armies of the Syrians all around the city, he came running in to his master and cried, "Elisha! Elisha! Look out there!" Elisha saw the armies of the Syrians surrounding the city. The servant cried, "What will we do? What will we do?" Elisha said, "Don't worry. Those who are with us are far more than those who are with them." The servant said, "What do you mean? There's no one here with us. We're all alone in the city." Then Elisha prayed, "Lord, open this young man's eyes." And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw that the mountains were full of horses and chariots of fire. Then he realized what Elisha meant when he said, "They who are with us are more than they who are with them," {cf, 2 Ki 6:15-17}. This is what the New Testament means when it says, "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world," {1 Jn 4:4 RSV}. There are greater forces on behalf of those who know God and are servants of his, than there are against us. What had happened to Daniel was simply that the curtain had dropped and he saw the One to whom prayer was being addressed.

In the next two verses there is recorded something very similar to the experience of the Apostle Paul. Daniel says,

And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me; my radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. {Dan 10:7-8 RSV}

Remember that Saul of Tarsus, before he became the Apostle Paul, was a violent persecutor of the church. He was on his way to Damascus to bring the Christians of that city to Jerusalem to stand trial for their faith in Jesus. Suddenly there was a light brighter than the sun that shone around him and he saw the Lord Jesus. He fell to the ground just as Daniel did. The men who were with him did not see the Person of Jesus but heard

only the sound of his voice speaking to the apostle Paul. Paul reacted the same way as Daniel. He was overwhelmed, he fell to the ground, and had no strength left in him. Of course, there are some who try to explain what Paul experienced as nothing but an epileptic fit. When that was reported to the great English preacher, Charles Spurgeon, he said, "O, blessed epilepsy! Would that every man in London could have epilepsy like that!"

So it was also with Daniel. He was overwhelmed by what he saw and by the greatness of the One whom he saw. He couldn't believe that suddenly he was in touch with the mighty One who was behind the ministry of prayer. Verse 9 adds another note:

Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in a deep sleep with my face to the ground. {Dan 10:9 RSV}

Does that sound like a church service? Many seem to say, "When I heard the sound of his words I promptly went to sleep." But this is not a church service; it is a prelude to revelation. The prophet Daniel is being prepared to learn something remarkable from this majestic being. He has already seen the majesty of Jesus Christ; now he is to be taught something of the mystery of prayer.

And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on hands and knees. And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly beloved. give heed to the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you." While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling. Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, so I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia and came to make you understand what is to befall your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come." {Dan 10:10-14 RSV}

A second being now appears, an angel sent to help Daniel. It does not seem likely that it is the same person he first saw, the man clothed in linen with eyes like flaming torches. The rest of the vision indicates that this is an angel sent from this great Person to help Daniel. He touches Daniel and helps him to his feet. Daniel stood up, trembling and shaking, and then the angel begins to reveal to him certain things about prayer. Surely all this is given to us in order that we might learn what takes place behind the scenes when we pray. The same great Being is there, and the helping angels are there too. The New Testament tells us that angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who shall be the heirs of salvation," {Heb 1:14}. They are at God's beck and call, to run his errands, do his work and to carry out his will on earth.

We heard today about a young soldier whose life was saved when a bullet was stopped by the New Testament in his pocket, the bullet stopping right at the 91st Psalm. What made that happen? Surely it was not an accident; it was an angel. The ministry of angels is continually occurring, though we are not aware of what is happening. What we think are ordinary coincidences are oftentimes the result of the ministry of angels. Daniel now has his eyes opened so that he can see what lies behind prayer. This angel comes to help him and to show him two great things.

The first thing is revealed in the words, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard." When Daniel began to pray the answer was sent immediately. This is the first thing Daniel is taught about prayer. Answers are absolutely sure when we pray. The angel said, in effect, "Daniel, the very moment that you people began to pray, three weeks ago, God heard you. The answer was on its way the minute you began to ask." Of course, Daniel was asking on the basis of the will of God. Prayer is not a way by which we get God to do what we want; prayer is a way by which we get involved in what God wants. Prayer is a way by which we become caught up in the exciting activity of God, doing what he plans to do in this world. As we pray about it we become involved in the whole exciting program. God works through us to ask for what he wants.

That is what Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount. He says we do not need to persuade God, to set up a picket line around him to force him to give in to us. Prayer is not a protest demonstration before God. We do

not need to harass him, harangue him, or twist his arm and besiege him with a flood of words until he gives in. No, Jesus says that is the way the pagans pray, using vain repetition. But your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Therefore prayer is not to tell God what he ought to do. We need to understand that. Prayer, rather, is to involve us with what God wants to do. He desires to have us involved. He wants us to ask him to do what he says he will do and he oftentimes will not do it at all unless we ask him. That is why James says, "You have not because you ask not," {cf, Jas 4:2}. If you would ask, God would do what he promises to do.

But now Daniel is told that answers are immediate and sure when you pray on that basis. Jesus said this also. He said, "Ask -- seek -- knock." These are three forms of prayer.

- Ask: simply ask him.
- Seek: that involves some investigation, a little study, some trying to understand what God is doing.
- Knock: that involves repetition, coming back again and again.

So there are three kinds of circumstances which require different types of prayer. We are to ask for some things, such as the things we need for personal strength: wisdom, love, power, grace -- all these things. James said, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men liberally and upbraids not, and it shall be given him," {cf, Jas 1:5}. But ask, seek, and knock -- all have the same guarantee: "ask...and it shall be given; seek...and you shall find; knock...and it will be opened unto you." "For," says Jesus, "to every one that asks shall be given. And every one who seeks shall find. And to every one who knocks, it shall be opened," {cf, Matt 7:7-8, Luke 11:9-10}. The answers are absolutely sure when prayer is made on the basis of what God has said he will do. This is what the angel made clear to Daniel. "The minute you began to pray," he said, "the answer was given."

But he goes on to show that delays are possible. Although the answer from God was sent immediately, it did not arrive for three weeks. Why not? What held it back? The angel says, "The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days." He is revealing that there are not only great and good angels of God ready to help us, but there are also evil angels, fallen angels, demons, that are ready to oppose what God is doing. In some remarkable way they relate to the nations of earth. Surely this is one of the most amazing passages of the Bible, for it helps us understand what is going on as reported in our daily newspapers.

Why are we going through such a worldwide outbreak of riot, violence, demonstration and unrest? It is not simply because students are not taught certain things in school, or that they are different from those in previous generations. Such explanations that are being offered today are most superficial. They do not get at the heart of the matter. The explanation is right here: Men are not the final issue; their actions are not the final explanation of what goes on. Behind men are invisible powers at work, controlling the minds and thoughts of men. That is why things happen in the world the way they do. Remember that Paul warns us in Ephesians 6 that we are not wrestling against flesh and blood, i.e., people are not our problem. We think they are. We always seek certain people that we can blame. The students blame the faculty; the faculty blame the students. The administration blames both. The government blames the people; the people blame the government. Capitalists blame labor; labor blames capitalists. Parents blame their children; children blame their parents. Everyone blames everyone else, and no one ever says, "It's me; I'm the one that's wrong." That is the problem in the world.

Paul says we are quite wrong when we say it is people who are the trouble: "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, wicked spirits in high places, the rulers of the darkness of this world," {cf, Eph 6:12}. That is what the angel is telling Daniel. He says that behind the affairs of earth is an invisible hierarchy of evil. They are assigned various countries to be under their control. Thus the evil angel who had authority over the kingdom of Persia came and withstood the angel who had been sent to Daniel, and held him back for twenty-one days. We do not know how he did it, but the angel said that Michael, the chief prince (the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff of heaven), came to help him and with his added power the answer was brought through to Daniel who knew nothing of what was going on behind the scenes.

Undoubtedly there is today an evil angel assigned to the United States to stir up all kinds of trouble. Doubtless he's been promoted lately! There is one also assigned to Soviet Russia, and to Red China, and to all the other countries of the world. These evil angels somehow relate to the countries of earth. That is the revelation Daniel

was shown. There are also angels who are ministers of good, of justice and truth, and they are in conflict, the one with the other.

Thus, delays can occur in prayer. The next time you have a prayer which is not answered as quickly as you think it ought to be, remember that you are engaged in a conflict. There can come delays, but no delay can ever throw God's schedule off. God is never too late. Never! He can always muster whatever force it takes to break through, and he will do so as long as faith remains. That is why prayer is so vitally important. It is for this reason that the New Testament tells us to pray for those in authority and power, in order, it says, that we might lead peaceable and godly lives, {cf, 1 Pet 2:1-2}. If you really believe in prayer, and believe what the Bible tells us about the other side of prayer, then you will express it by praying a great deal more. This is the philosophy behind our church prayer meetings.

We will look at the third lesson Daniel was taught by this angel, in Verses 15-17:

When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and was dumb. And behold, one in the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke. I said to him who stood before me, "O my Lord, by reason of the vision pains have come upon me, and I retain no strength. How can my lord's servant talk with my lord? For now no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me." {Dan 10:15-17 RSV}

This vision had a terrible physical effect upon Daniel. The prayer, the mourning, the fasting, the waiting for three weeks, all this had taken its toll of him. This tremendous vision, so emotionally gripping and overpowering, had simply drained away all his physical strength. It reminds us that prayer can often be a very costly thing. It is hard work at times, spiritually costly. It is not always easy. Sometimes it is agony to pray.

There is a verse in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians that has always encouraged me. He writes, "Death is at work in us, but life in you," {cf, 2 Cor 4:12}. That is another commentary on prayer. It declares that it is possible for you to go through agony on my behalf. I don't feel the agony but you do, yet I get the blessing of it. You parents can do that for your children. When you see them getting into trouble, and there is no way, seemingly, to stop them; when they are blind or deaf to what you say, and you see something they do not see, you can strive for them in prayer; you can agonize on their behalf. Death can be at work in you, but God will work life in them. Is that not encouraging? And you children can do the same thing for your parents. When they get stubborn and hardhearted, not understanding the situation and fouling up the whole matter (as they can at times) and you cannot say anything to them, you can pray for them. Death can be at work in you, but life in them. That is what the word declares. What a tremendous thing this is, to enter into spiritual combat, this really vital fight of faith, in order to accomplish what would never be done otherwise!

But prayer is not all weakness and mystery. There is a ministry to us in it as well. The last scene of this chapter sets it before us:

Again one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, "O man greatly beloved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage." And when he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me." {Dan 10:18 RSV}

After the angel's second touch Daniel was greatly strengthened. And we are told exactly how. The angel said to him, "Fear not," i.e., all reason for fear has been removed. Then he gave three factors in that, "peace be with you: be strong and of good courage." That is what prayer does for us. Every time we come to the Lord in prayer it brings peace to the soul, strength to the body, and courage to the spirit. The whole man is ministered to.

Paul says that to the Philippians, "Be anxious about nothing [don't be afraid], but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ," {cf, Phil 4:6-7}. Peace! That wonderful sense that everything is all right, even though nothing has changed. You have peace in your heart, as Daniel had. That also means strength to the body. When the heart is at peace the body is strengthened. And

that, in turn, gives courage to the will, to the spirit. You are ready to take up the battle again. That is what prayer does.

There is also another purpose, says the angel to Daniel. "Then he (the angel) said. 'Do you know why I have come to you?'" That is encouragement to Daniel to think a bit. Then the angel goes on to answer his own question.

"But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I am through with him, lo, the prince of Greece will come." {Dan 10:20 RSV}

The implication is, "I've got a lot more fighting to do, Daniel, and I have come to strengthen you that you might fight with me. I'm going back and fight with the prince of Persia, the invisible angel behind the scenes of Persian affairs. And when I am through with him, then the prince of Greece will come. But I have strengthened you, Daniel, that you might stand with me in all this."

The second thing that prayer did for Daniel is found in Verse 21:

"But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth:" {Dan 10:21a RSV}

That is the introduction to chapters eleven and twelve of this book, the greatest vision Daniel was ever given. It is a marvelous unfolding of many of the events that are to come in history, from Daniel's day to the first appearance of the Lord Jesus, and then there is a great leap to the time of the end -- when, in a very vivid passage, Daniel is told what will happen at the end of this age, just before Jesus Christ returns again. We have not even yet come to those days. Daniel's eyes were opened and he was helped to see what is written in the book of truth and to understand it.

What a wonderful promise it is to be told what is inscribed in the book of truth! Jesus said, "When the Holy Spirit is come, he will guide you into all the truth. He will take of the things of mine and reveal them unto you," {cf, John 16:13-14}. That is the only way we can know what is going to happen. It is to take:

- The book that God has given to us,
- The book that understands us,
- The book that knows how we think and how we act and what is going on in our thoughts, and
- Ask the Spirit to show us what is in it.

We need to learn from it, how to control and govern the passions that spring up within, how to lay hold of the mighty power that God has made available to us, so that we can know where to get strength to handle these passions, to cope with them and live honestly, openly, powerfully, sweetly and joyfully in the midst of a decaying age.

That is all made available to us as we understand the program of God and the power of prayer.

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