

Daniel is also broken by sin. He confronts his human sinfulness as he encounters the radiant purity of this heavenly being. In the previous chapter, Daniel confessed his own sin and the sin of his people; now he has to face this awe-invoking presence of the One to whom he has confessed. It's no wonder he cannot stand!

In addition to the weight of sin, Daniel also breaks under the weight of the future distresses revealed to him. Fighting will continue with the king of Persia. Next will come a cruel king from Greece, the persecution of God's people, and the destruction of Jerusalem. Great heartache lies in the future for God's people; the aged Daniel nearly collapses under the weight of such burdensome knowledge.

But amid all this heartache, God provides Daniel some comfort. Despite the crippling burdens of his situation and knowledge, Daniel finds the strength to stand again in these words from the man in linen: *O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you* (v. 11). The man tells Daniel he is a beloved person. Daniel, who has been down on his knees, stands up. Just the strength of God's "I love you, Daniel" gets him to his feet.

The assurance of God's care in the midst of our distress is meant to have just such an effect, renewing our strength and enabling us to face what we must. And to make sure these are the effects, the messenger's next words are "fear not" (v. 12). When the glory of God is so great that it might obscure the love God has for God's people, God always assures them that they need not fear harm from God. The circumstances into which God comes may be frightening, and God's own nature requires our awe, but God comes to overcome our fears with the promise of God's care.

Then God's messenger says to Daniel: *From the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard* (v. 12). Essentially God says, "I have heard you and I have come to you because you sought me." Such assurance of God's presence in response to prayer is our greatest strength in times of trouble. We do not need to have all our questions immediately answered if we know that God hears us. When the infinitely powerful and holy God comes to hear and be near to us through our prayers, we can face whatever we must with the assurance of God's care.

But Daniel does not merely have words to assure him of God's presence: the messenger is there with him. Here, in the midst of Daniel's isolation and loss, there is a Christ-like

appearance of God who promises love (v. 11), a hearing (v. 12), and peace (v. 19). Assurance of such presence does not make our problems vanish, but it enables us to face them with courage and hope.

**The Second Touch Enables Daniel to Speak.** When the glory of God appears before Daniel, he does what all the prophets do: he turns his face to the ground and shuts his mouth (v. 15). When the radiance of God's holiness overwhelmed the prophet Isaiah, he said, *Woe is me!...I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips* (Isa. 6:5). He acknowledged that he was not worthy to join the "holy, holy, holy" song of the angels. Even a righteous prophet has no right to speak before the holy God. A seraph took a coal from the altar and touched the lips of the prophet (Isa. 6:1-8). Only then could Isaiah speak to and for God. The message is plain: by the work of God, a human can join the song of heaven. We are made worthy by a divine touch.

Daniel also gets a touch on the lips (v. 16), and with this touch the Lord gives Daniel the ability to speak in the presence of the Holy God. Surprisingly, the first thing Daniel says is: *By reason of the vision pains have come upon me* (v. 16) and *I am so weak that I cannot speak* (v. 17). The words are incredibly personal. Daniel recognizes simultaneously that he has permission to speak, but that has no strength to speak. He confesses that he is helpless (vv. 16-17) and cannot breathe enough even to talk (v. 17). God's touch made Daniel able to open his heart and confess his weakness before God.

Heaven's touch gives Daniel enough strength to say, "I am weak." The Lord's presence provides him enough awe to say, "I am speechless." The Lord's mercy provides him enough breath to say, "I can't breathe." Each phrase is a confession of utter inadequacy that God both enables and receives. Daniel's confession of inadequacy, his utter humility, is the best expression of godliness that can be expressed before the face of God and is precisely what we should expect from Daniel – and what God should expect from us.

Daniel's willingness to confess such helplessness is also our great hope. This second touch from God that enables Daniel to open his heart to God without fear of rejection assures us we can confess our helplessness, too. This is the sweet grace of the gospel, assuring us that we don't have to have our lives cleaned up before God will receive us.

**The Third Touch Enables Daniel to Rest.** After he had opened his heart about his inadequacy, Daniel records that the man in linen touched him again and strengthened him (v. 18). The

man of God is not repulsed by Daniel's weakness, but says instead: *O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you* (v. 19). The promise of peace is no small blessing in this context. Daniel not only has reason to fear the man in linen, but he also has good reason to fear the future. The prophecy that will be related by the man from God is of a great and extended battle that will envelop the world and oppress God's people. Yet the man dressed in linen offers Daniel peace. The result is not merely comfort, but also courage. Fear is overcome by assurance of divine love, which leads to personal peace, which provides strength for God's purposes.

Daniel has good reason to fear heaven's judgment as well as earth's empires. Yet the Lord urges him to be at peace. How is such peace possible in light of all that Daniel fears? The answer lies in Daniel's knowing not only what will come but also who will be with him. The chapter concludes with the man of God saying: *But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince* (v. 21). "The book of truth" is the record of the future, of what will come. This is a precious reminder that the things to come are not a surprise to God. God is never caught off guard, never unprepared; so we need not fear that anything will occur to undo God's plan and purpose.

The three touches that enable Daniel to stand, to open his heart, and to have peace ultimately grant him the ability to fulfill his prophetic purposes despite the conflicts of body and spirit that weaken him. The revelation of those touches is meant to do the same for us. These touches are reminders that God is with us, that Christ fights for us, and that the Holy Spirit grants us strength and peace in this fallen world until the consummation of all things. In this present age, our God does not promise us the absence of trouble, but God does promise God's presence, God's love, and the fulfillment of God's purposes – so we can be at peace and fulfill God's purposes.

**Gracious God, this world sometimes bewilders me and is beyond my understanding. I see poverty and disease, storms and earthquakes, war and killing. Many hearts are bound by ego and fear. Please strengthen my faith in your higher purpose and open my mind to the truth that everything is unfolding according to your divine plan. Let compassion and love for my brothers and sisters flow from me and may we all be uplifted by your glory. AMEN.**

## The Three-Touch Gospel

Sunday, March 22, 2015

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

### ***Daniel 10:10-19a***

As the end of Israel's captivity nears, Daniel receives one final vision. The vision, which begins in chapter 10 and concludes in chapter 12, reveals that great hardship still awaits God's people. There will be generations of war and suffering before God's kingdom comes and God's people have peace. Things should be getting better, but they are getting worse. Daniel is distraught and he wonders how he can keep going. He cannot eat; he mourns for weeks, he does not take care of his body. Daniel seeks some assurance of God's continuing care, and God does not disappoint Daniel.

God comforts Daniel by sending a man dressed in linen with a gold sash. The identity of this man is echoed in the book of Revelation, where one who is "like a son of man" appears:

*...I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. 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, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.*

This is Jesus Christ, the anointed Son of Man, who represents the glory and purposes of God. There are some striking similarities between the figure in Daniel and the Son of Man in Revelation: both are clothed in white robes (priestly garb); both have a gold belt (kingly apparel); both have blazing eyes and bronze skin and roaring voices (all divine traits). The One who comes to Daniel as a spokesman for God reaches down and touches Daniel three times, in three significant ways, providing assurance and strength so Daniel can continue to do God's work.

**The First Touch Enables Daniel to Stand.** Although his people will return home, Daniel will be left behind. Still in captivity, and now ninety years old, Daniel will never get back to his homeland. He knows it and the man in white linen does not change that reality. And so, Daniel is heartbroken.