

War of the Gods

Messages from the Book of Daniel

Message 11

Warfare by Prayer

Daniel 10:1-11:1

Fasting in Festival

It was Passover! The first month of the year in the Jewish calendar was a festive occasion because Passover was celebrated on the 14th. This was the great feast that commemorated God's deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. Each family would take a lamb and kill it for the feast as a reminder that God had killed the first-born in all Egyptian families when He delivered Israel from slavery. Passover was followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was also a festive affair. Listen to God's command regarding this feast.

You shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide.¹² And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes. (Deuteronomy 16:11-12)

While the Jews were in Babylon, I suppose these festivals were bittersweet. Everyone loves a party, but here they were, exiled from their own land – captives among a strange people. The sorrow would have been multiplied by knowing that the exile was entirely their own fault. It was their sins which caused God to bring the Babylonians against them and enabled a foreign power to destroy their beloved nation.

But this story takes place in the third year of the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia, who conquered the Babylonian Empire. In the first year of his reign he issued a decree permitting the Jews to return to Israel and rebuild the temple. So in a real sense the exile was now over! At this point any Jews who remained in Babylon or elsewhere in the empire did so of their own free will. So these first month festivals should have been celebrated with unprecedented joy! Then why was Daniel fasting?

The text does not answer this question, but we can see that Daniel's fast extended right through the holidays. From other prophets we can tell that those first settlers who returned to Jerusalem began to rebuild the temple, but soon gave up. A very likely possibility is that Daniel heard that the work on the temple had stopped, and turned to prayer and fasting as a consequence. In either case, the seriousness of Daniel's purpose is evident in his fasting when everyone else was feasting.

Spiritual Warfare

God answered Daniel's prayer, and in so doing we have one of the most remarkable chapters in the whole Bible. It is as if here the curtains of heaven are pulled back and we catch a glimpse of that unseen world which is constantly with us. Here and there through scripture we see snatches of the world of the spirits. Abraham, Lot, Jacob, and even Laban were visited by angels. Moses and Joshua were visited by God Himself. The book of Job is the first text that describes interaction between God and Satan. God allowed Satan to torment Job, to prove that Job's faith could withstand such a great temptation. Job never knew why he was suffering so much. Only we, the readers know that Job's suffering was an earthly manifestation of a spiritual struggle. Later we catch another brief picture of the spirit world. At the end of 1 Kings we have a scene where King Ahab is considering whether to go into battle or not. All his false prophets encouraged him to do so. Then a true prophet came forward and reported what he saw in heaven.

Then Micaiah said, “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left. ²⁰ And the LORD said, ‘Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?’ So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. ²¹ Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, and said, ‘I will persuade him.’ ²² The LORD said to him, ‘In what way?’ So he said, ‘I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ And the LORD said, ‘You shall persuade him, and also prevail. Go out and do so.’ ²³ Therefore look! The LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the LORD has declared disaster against you.” (1 Kings 22:19-23)

The book of Revelation also reveals spiritual warfare, but this passage in Daniel shows us all the essentials. Here we see that struggles on earth are reflections of spiritual battles between angels and demons. We see that there are demonic spirits behind the evil carried out by the nations of this world. We see also that God’s angels fight for His people and move history in the direction He has determined. Finally, we see that the prayers of God’s people play a major role in the progress of heavenly events.

In the rest of our time tonight, we are going to consider four aspects of spiritual warfare which are illustrated in this passage, and then conclude by applying this to ourselves.

The Glory

First, spiritual warfare is a glorious calling. Of course that can be true of any sort of warfare – at least wars in which brave men valiantly defend their homeland from aggressors. World War II General George Patton was perhaps a bit extreme, but there is truth in his perspective. “War is mankind’s noblest endeavor. God how I love it!” Patton’s Third Army earned glory for itself in the battle for Sicily, the sweep across northern Europe, and the Battle of the Bulge. They were so good, they raced ahead of all the other Allied forces and outran their supply lines. But back to our text, last week we reviewed what Daniel accomplished in his life. In a hostile culture Daniel remained true to God, converted two pagan kings, which led to an empire-wide order to worship the true God of heaven. Last week we saw Daniel facing the dark reality that the time for Israel to return home was rapidly approaching, but the Jews still had not repented of their sins and turned to follow God with all their heart. Chapter nine records Daniel’s prayer of confession for his people, and his desperate cry for God to restore their nation. And now we see that Daniel has succeeded again! By the time of chapter 10, the exile is over!

In these studies in Daniel we have emphasized the recurring theme of God’s sovereign over nations and over history. Now we see the flip side to that truth – that God works out His plan through the faithful obedience of His people. The interaction between God’s sovereign rule and man’s initiative is very profound, but real. We can rightly say that God restored the Jews, and also that Daniel brought about the restoration. God used Daniel. When Daniel prayed, God answered.

Now I say, isn’t it wonderful that the exile was over? Wouldn’t you have been thrilled to have played a part in its end? I am sure Daniel was enormously pleased that he was able to end the exile by his prayers. Such is the case with everyone who engages the spiritual battle. Think of Martin Luther. Luther knew in his heart that the rites of the church by themselves would not enable him to escape the wrath of a just God. When he learned that God saves us by grace received only by faith, he preached this gospel all over Europe. Standing before the Diet of Worms, men who had the power to execute him, he refused to deny the truth he discovered in scripture. Luther lived most of his life with a price on his head. For the nine months after his famous appearance at Worms he had to hide in a remote castle. But Luther, the coal miner’s son, loved the common people, and longed for all Germans to know God. Luther knew that his struggle was not against the corruption in Rome as much as wicked spirits. In his greatest hymn we sing,

And though this world, with devils filled,
 should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear for God hath willed
 His truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
 we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
 for lo! his doom is sure;
One little word shall fell him.

The world as we know it would not exist apart from the work of Martin Luther. Isn't that glorious?

Sixteenth century Scotland was a barely civilized country. Like most of Europe at the time, the church in Scotland had sunk into moral depravity. When John Knox heard the gospel and became converted, his greatest desire was the salvation of his countrymen. He had to spend many years in exile in Geneva, but when Mary came to the throne, he was able to return home. He completely overhauled the church. Knox's cry to God was, "Give me Scotland, or I die!" God answered that prayer, and He used Knox to totally transform that country.

I first met Eric Molicki when he was a freshman. He was just as energetic then as he is now, as the RUF campus minister at Brown University. Over the next four years Eric, Mark, Dan, and several others took a group of several dozen and turned it into a ministry powerhouse of 130 people. Eric organized everyone, but Dan recognized the vital importance of prayer. He spent his last year at Bucknell persuading people to come to Noon Prayer. They typically had between 15 and 25 people praying everyday – mostly due to Dan's vision and recruitment. Sixteen hundred years earlier a mother was praying for her son. He was a bright boy, but he showed no interest in serving God. He taught rhetoric and lived with a mistress. Meanwhile Monica never ceased praying. Finally after over a dozen years of prayer, Augustine gave his life to Christ. Thus began the career of the greatest theologian since St. Paul. Back to the 18th century, and Susanna Wesley prayed for her boys and diligently taught them the scripture. John and Charles went to university as unbelievers, but by the end of their lives they had overturned English society with their preaching. All because of the faithfulness of their mother.

For thousands of years men and women have fought spiritual battles. I have only named a few of the many saints who have changed the course of history because they knew that history is determined in heaven. They prayed, God acted, and the world was never the same. Some were magnetic personalities, others never left home. Some were scholars, others were artists, some were preachers, others were politicians. But all had access into heaven, and they used it. Someday your time on earth will be over. What will you have to show for it? Do you secretly long for material blessings. Do you live by the bumper sticker which said, "Life is a game, and he who ends with the most toys wins"? Do you live for pleasure? Do you crave popularity, or professional accolades? When you die, what will be your mark for the Kingdom of Heaven? What will be your eternal legacy? Will you leave behind faithful children, a solid witness in your neighborhood and in your profession, and service to mankind? Or will you accomplish nothing of eternal value? There is great glory in spiritual warfare, but deep shame in living for yourself. Do not waste your life on worthless pursuits when you have the chance to leave behind an eternal legacy.

The Hardship

Spiritual warfare is a glorious calling, but it is also a great hardship. In addition to the ordinary struggle of living for God, Daniel also suffered in the spiritual battle. Three times in this episode his vision so overwhelmed him that he collapsed and had to be revived. If you would change the course of history, you will suffer physical, spiritual, and psychological exhaustion. Is it worth it? You bet! I began my senior year

at the university in a fellowship of 20 people. Within two weeks there were 40, and by the end of the year we had 55. Our campus worker only visited us one day every three weeks. It was the most exhausting year of my life. I was scheduled to go to Morocco in the summer. It was a good trip, but I had a sense of being in a fog all summer. At school we did not have a resident campus minister, but we had prayer. The ministry team met for an hour every Sunday night to pray. Discussion was forbidden in that hour. We closed the door and promptly began. And week by week God performed miracles. I led a freshman to the Lord who later became the president of the group. In the years following the ministry grew to over 100, and one man I trained took a friend to the mission field. Would I trade that kind of impact for a restful senior year? No way!

Anyone can engage the spiritual battle: men and women, boys and girls, rich and poor, eloquent and mumblers. All it takes is stamina. Most people do not do this because they get tired and give up. They pray for something for a few days or weeks, and lose interest. Spiritual warfare is long and dangerous. Daniel fought all his life, and he nearly died several times. But in the end he changed the world.

The Acts

Third, the central acts of spiritual warfare are proclaiming the scripture, and praying. The classic text on this topic is Ephesians 6:10-18.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:10-18)

We covered this last spring when we studied Ephesians, but here are a few reminders. Notice this passage says explicitly that our battle is not with people on earth, but with angels and demons in the heavenly realm. This means that it is wrong to become angry with the president of Iran, or doctors who abort babies, or pornographers. These people are enslaved by our real enemy – the demons who have deceived them and keep them in darkness. It is the demonic powers we should attack. Notice also that our two weapons are scripture and prayer. By skillful use of these we defeat our spiritual enemies.

The topic of spiritual warfare can open the way to wild ideas. You may have heard of people who use special procedures or formulas to defeat demons. One such technique is to name the demon, which supposedly gives you power over it. This is nonsense. Nowhere in scripture are we instructed to use some technique or formula to defeat our spiritual enemy. Such things are essentially magic. By simple, but persistent prayer and spreading of scripture, the demonic hordes are forced into retreat.

Is it a little clearer why I am so determined to have Bible studies in every residence on campus? Do you see why I am so committed to Noon Prayer? These are the front lines in our attack on the Satanic powers at Lehigh. Every time we open God's word we wound the enemy more deeply. Every time we pray, he reels at our blows. Armed with God's word and prayer, we are invading Satan's territory and destroying his hold on people. Each group of you who are leading Bible studies are guerrilla squads in the thick of battle. And it is hard, isn't it? It does take perseverance. Some of you know what it is like to labor week

after week with hardly any interest in your efforts. But are you praying fervently? If so, you are accomplishing something, and in God's time you will see the fruit of your labors.

If we persevere, God will use us at Lehigh. But we may also affect the nations by our prayers. I love psalm 149. Let me read the last five verses.

- 5 Let the saints be joyful in glory;
Let them sing aloud on their beds.
 - 6 Let the high praises of God be in their mouth,
And a two-edged sword in their hand,
 - 7 To execute vengeance on the nations,
And punishments on the peoples;
 - 8 To bind their kings with chains,
And their nobles with fetters of iron;
 - 9 To execute on them the written judgment;
This honor have all His saints. Praise the LORD!
- Psalm 149:5-9

You see how the *saints* – that's us – bind kings and nobles? If we do this by singing on our beds, that must mean prayer. God is at work in the world, shaping history – but He uses our prayers to do so. You want to do more than talk about changing the world? Come to Noon Prayer. One of our current projects is to secure the release of Lina Joy, a Malaysian woman on trial for converting to Christianity. I am not sure that God plans to release her, but I am sure this fight can be a sound defeat for Satan in Malaysia. Do not just complain about the world. Change it! Pray!

The Power

So far this has sounded like a call to arms, I suppose. Perhaps some of you thrill to the sound of arms and the sight of war. Others of you doubt your ability to measure up to such a lofty vision. You are the fortunate ones. Whoever is rarin' to go will quickly burn out because he relies on his own strength. Folks, you cannot pray for long on your own power. It is too hard. You cannot keep proclaiming the word of God to deaf ears unless God energizes you. Even Daniel could not endure the spiritual struggle. Three times God had to strengthen him. No one here has the stamina to finish the fight. Our fourth point about spiritual warfare is that only if you confess your weakness and rely on Christ do you have any hope of accomplishing much of significance.

But that means you first must know God. If you have not believed in Jesus, that puts you on the wrong side of this war. Scripture tells us that Jesus has defeated Satan, and He will win all the battles in the end. You do not want to be on the losing side! Tonight, decide to follow Jesus. Join us in this great calling of establishing God's Kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven.

The Present

Tonight we have looked at the glory, the hardship, the acts, and the power of spiritual warfare. I have told you several stories tonight about how others have engaged the spiritual enemy and won great victories. The danger is that you will try to go an imitate other people. That will not work. The stories I have told are not methods or strategies that guarantee success. I do not want you to imitate Luther, or Eric, or me, or anyone. Each of you is unique, and God has a special plan for each of you. But wherever God leads you, you can pray and spread God's word to those around you. The real question tonight is, will you? Look around you. You live in a free country, and every hour you have opportunities to advance God's Kingdom. Our only problem is in not caring to do so. Repent of your callousness. Ask God to give you compassion on

the lost. Be bold. Pray passionately and persistently for God to convert your professor. And the atheist in your hall. And the loud frat guys. Then go talk to them. It does not matter as much what you say, as that you attempt to tell them Jesus died for their sins and now rules the earth. Of course they will mock you. What do you expect? This is war! But Jesus always wins in the end.

But are there any here tonight who are called to something different? Is there anyone here who is saying in your heart, “God, give me Dravo or I die”? George Schwab was convinced that God had a ministry for him in a dorm at Drexel University. So he did not get an apartment. The problem was that since he had dropped out of on-campus housing, he was at the *bottom* of the waiting list. The first day of classes George did not have a room. So he got a sleeping bag and slept in the office. For three weeks George slept in the office, praying for God to let him live in a dorm. Finally a room opened up, and George had a powerful witness there that year. Is there anyone here who has a passion for a dorm? or an athletic team? or ROTC? or a club? War is hard. How much are you willing to suffer? Or to rephrase the question, how much of God’s power are you willing to let Him pour into you? Daniel was only a government bureaucrat, but he knew how to fight spiritually, and he changed the world. Will you?

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