

Mystery Of Prayer

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[0 : 00] me to Daniel chapter 10 and it'll certainly be a big help if you can have that open in front of you. And we're really getting into some of the most strange and extraordinary chapters in this book.

But nonetheless it's the Word of God and it's here for our learning, our encouragement and our strengthening. And tonight really the message is all about the mystery of prayer.

Daniel chapters 10 to 12 are all part of one single section that incorporate Daniel's last great vision. And thus far when we've looked at his visions in Daniel the major focus has been laying out the expectation for the future of God's people from the time of their exile through until the coming of what chapter 9 called an anointed one.

One who would usher in everlasting righteousness, who would atone for iniquity and put an end to sin forever. We saw that in that last section of chapter 9 last time.

Back in chapter 2 remember Daniel saw that the God of heaven was setting up a kingdom that would one day take over the whole earth.

[1 : 27] In chapter 7 he saw further that that was all to do with the Son of Man. The Son of Man triumphing and ascending to glory to receive the kingdom to share with his saints, the saints of the Most High.

There shouldn't be any great surprise to us that God should be laying out a future that in fact turned out to be several hundred years. God has done this before. Isaiah tells us remember that he is the God who knows the future and tells the future.

That's what marks out the living God from the dead idols, the wood and the stone, the mumbo-jumbo gods that the peoples of this world worship. Remember back in Genesis chapter 15, God laid out to Abraham 400 years of history in Egypt that would have to happen before the people of God would go up again to the promised land.

So that's the focus of the visions to Daniel. As a new stage of God's redemption history, his story of salvation is about to unfold as the exiles are about to return from exile and enter a new phase of history as God's people.

But in the midst of this, as Daniel has been seeing this next phase of history laid out before him, there have been hints of something more than this. That these, what the prophet calls the latter days, that these latter days are not quite what they may seem at first.

[3 : 00] They're not going to be quite as immediately final as they seem at first sight. Not quite, in and of themselves, the ultimate end of history. Do you remember in chapter 7, after the saints received the kingdom, still, mysteriously, there would be conflict for the saints of God until a final day of judgment came when all the dominion of the demonic forces would finally, at last, be done away with.

Remember last time in chapter 9, verses 24 to the end, particularly verses 26 and 27, we saw that after the 69 weeks of years had given way to the decisive intervention of the Anointed One and the putting away of sin and all the rest of it, establishing righteousness, after that, still, there are these strange words in verse 26, and to the end there shall be war.

Verse 27, there will be desolations until a decreed end. And what we have in this last vision that takes us really in chapter 11 and through to chapter 12 is an expansion of this theme of what Daniel has glimpsed so far.

What he has seen is a future that stretches out even beyond the beginning of these latter days, to the very end of these latter days, to a final end that in fact chapter 12 is very clear if you look at chapter 12, verse 2, a final day that will end with the day of final resurrection of all the dead, rising to judgment.

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. The great focus then is on events that stretch to the very end, not just the very end of Israel's exile, not even just to the very end of that ultimate sacrifice for sin, but to the very end of history itself.

[5 : 12] And this phrase, the latter days or the days yet to come or the time of the end, we'll find out repeatedly throughout these last three chapters. And the very last verse of the book, look at the very last verse of chapter 12, is very clear that this is the absolute end of history that's being talked about, isn't it?

You shall stand, Daniel, in your allotted place at the end of days. He's clearly speaking of resurrection, if you've got an NIV, it translates it like this. You will rise to receive your inheritance. You will stand, rise. It's the same word. So the focus here is on the future for God's people, the people of faith, not just for a few more years until the exile is over, not just even for another half millennium or so, the 70 times 7 weeks of years, 490 odd years, until the anointed one himself would come.

No, right beyond that to the very end of history itself, until the day when those who are in the dust of the earth shall arise and face the judgment. And that's what these last three chapters are particularly focusing on.

So however difficult they are, it should be fairly obvious, therefore, that these chapters must be as relevant to us today as they were to Daniel then. Because we too are still waiting for that day, aren't we?

[6 : 34] So however hard it is to understand, we must struggle until we do understand them, as verse 1 tells us, ultimately Daniel did. He had understanding of the vision.

And the message, friends, I have to tell you, is a struggle to come to terms with. Not so much, I think, because of its obscurity, but rather because of its disturbing and unpalatable nature. It's a hard message. It's a message that we will naturally shrink from. Because, as verse 1 sums it up, really in a nutshell, it is a great conflict.

It concerns a great war, as the NIV puts it. That's the fearful truth that Daniel has to grapple with. That is the future for God's people until the very end of history.

That's the message. A great war. And it's going to be marked the life of faith by battles and by conflicts and by opposition and by warfare.

[7 : 46] It's going to be unremitting, relentless war, conflict, until the last day of history. And that's not an easy message for us to take on board, is it, as Christians?

But, friends, that is the message that we need to grasp as believers who still await that day of resurrection. We can't avoid it. We just can't pretend it's not so.

Daniel is told, this word was true. Even though the Christ, even though the Anointed One has come and put an end to sin forever and has won His kingdom to share with His saints, even so, there will be a conflict right to the end for the saints of the Most High God.

Well, I don't know about you, but that's a tough message for me to stomach. Isn't that the opposite of so much frivolous and superficial and triumphalistic Christianity today?

It's always been like that. Right back in Daniel's time, right back in the Old Testament time, there were prophets who said, peace, peace, peace, when there was no peace. No, the true prophet speaks the truth of God and it's concerning a great conflict.

[9 : 07] And Daniel must grasp this if he and his people were to understand how to live as God's people in their day and how to play their part in God's ongoing purpose of salvation for the world.

And so must we. And that's why we're studying these chapters. And chapter 10 was Daniel's preparation for receiving this last vision.

He needed to come to terms with certain things before he could really grasp everything that God was going to reveal to him in the final vision. And so this chapter really serves as an extended introduction to the visions of chapter 11 and chapter 12.

But it has much to teach us. Much to teach us about God and his work in salvation and about our own part in God's great plan.

So we're going to look at it under three headings. First of all the sorrowful prophet and then a sovereign presence and lastly a sufficient prayer.

[10 : 11] Verses 1 to 3 begin with a picture of a sorrowful prophet don't they? They set the scene and the unavoidable message for us is this.

It's the need for realism in the life of faith. We need to understand that despite the revelation that God's given his people about the certain future of his kingdom that it shall be built that nothing will prevail against the kingdom of Christ.

Nevertheless there will be many perplexities in the life of faith. There will be many things to concern us to discourage us as God's people many things in life to make us mourn just as Daniel did. Indeed there are and there always will be real enemies of the kingdom of Christ. And so real believers believers who understand the truth who are realists will always find that there will be times when they are mourning.

When they're praying to God fervently for his intervention. You see we have to ask why in verse 2 Daniel was mourning and fasting. Why was this?

[11 : 28] Well the answer is given in verse 1 in the date. We've already seen haven't we how in the book of Daniel precise dates are given for things and often the key to things lies within them.

This is the third year of Cyrus that's 537 or 536 B.C. Now if you know anything about Bible history surely you'd be saying Daniel must have been rejoicing at that time.

Why? Because well of course in the first year of Cyrus a decree had gone out saying the exile was to end. That captives were to be sent back to Jerusalem. You read about it in Ezra chapter 1 that they had already begun to go back under Sheshbazzar and under Zerubbabel and Joshua the first pile of exiles had gone back.

So why wasn't Daniel rejoicing? Why wasn't he thrilled? Daniel hadn't gone with them we don't know why but by now it's clear that he's in his mid-eighties so maybe he was too old to go.

But indeed the scriptures tell us that a rather feeble number did go back. Most of the Israelites it seems seemed to have settled down in Babylon and got used to the life and the culture there and didn't seem to have any desire to return to the beautiful land as they called it.

[12 : 49] Maybe that was part of Daniel's sorrow. But truly there must be more to it than that. To turn the first month of the year the time of Passover the time of joyful celebrations of God's deliverance to turn that into mourning and fasting.

Well yes there was more cause because we were now into the second year of the exile's return and the work to begin rebuilding the temple had in fact started but no sooner had the rebuilding work started if you know the history than it had stopped again.

It had come to an absolute standstill. In fact it did so after a few months and wasn't begun again for a full sixteen years. It's worth us just turning to Ezra chapters three and four to see why this was.

If you wanted the church bibles I think it's page 390. We'll just turn back to Ezra chapter three. You'll see there that in Ezra chapter three verse eight we're told that in the second year after their returning they began to rebuild the temple.

But look at chapter four verse one. Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel.

[14 : 18] Immediately you will see enemies arose. Look at verse four. The people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and bride counselors against them to frustrate their purpose.

All the days of Cyrus, king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius, king of Persia. And the result, look down to verse 24. The work on the house of God that is in Jerusalem stopped and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

In fact, the whole of Ezra chapter four gives us a parenthesis. Verse six speaks about later opposition under Artaxerxes and it lays out the fact that that opposition was concerted and continuous against the people of God for almost a hundred years, right through the book of Ezra, right through the book of Nehemiah, all the way.

There are enemies, real enemies, of the kingdom of Christ. They are determined to frustrate the work of building his kingdom. And that's what Daniel knew.

And that's why Daniel mourned. By the way, just while we're still in the book of Ezra, if you are, just look at the nature of the opposition in Ezra four, verse two. These people came along and said to the Israelites, we're the same as you, we've got the same faith as you, we worship God just like you do.

[15 : 48] Of course, it wasn't true at all. These were Samaritans, they used the same language of the faith, but they totally mixed their faith of Israel and with the local customs, with all the pagan features of the culture around them.

Yet they said, let's work with you because we're all in the same church together. Very familiar. I keep hearing it all the time these days. Let's work together for the good of the Kirk. We're all part of the same church.

I had somebody in correspondence with me this very week, a minister who's engaged in the active promotion of homosexual relationships within the church.

They said exactly that. Let's work together for the good of the Kirk. I said let us all work together for the good of the gospel of Jesus Christ and his truth. What does the leader of God's people say here in verse 3?

Does he say let's rejoice in your new theological insights? Yes, let's all work together for this project. No, he says you have nothing to do with us. You're not allies, you're enemies.

[16:52] And of course pretty soon their true colours became obvious. It was a campaign of intimidation, of outright opposition against the kingdom of Christ. It's very telling, isn't it?

The focus of the enemies of the kingdom of Christ is always the same. They always do two things. What do they try and do here? They try and destroy true temple worship.

In other words, they try and destroy the focus that God has given on one way that he is commanded of worshipping him. The uniqueness of the one true God who can be approached in the one way that God has appointed.

Which of course now in New Testament terms means approaching God through the unique Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ, his Son. And they try and corrupt true holiness.

Trying to stop the people of God, listening to God's commands about how he wants them to live distinctively as a people apart. Well, that's exactly the way it is today, isn't it?

[17:55] What are the great pressures from those who claim to want to be building the same kingdom of Christ in his church? What are the two great attacks?

Well, of course, on the uniqueness of Christ and on the authority of God's word. Especially these days in regards to what it dictates about sexual lifestyles.

Twin attacks on true worship of the one true God and Jesus Christ alone and attack on true holiness, listening to the word of the one true God.

Nothing's changed in 4,000 years. We shouldn't be surprised. Yes, there are enemies of the kingdom of Christ and they're often very powerful and they're often very effective.

Here, they stopped the work of rebuilding the temple for 16 years. And Daniel knew this had begun and that was his agony, that was his great grief.

[18:57] But you see, he was a realist. He didn't just try and pretend, oh well, it'll all be alright. He didn't just quote trite verses, oh everything will be alright for the people of God, all things work together for good.

No, he wept, he fasted, he implored God, he knew he was seeing with his own eyes and hearing reports of what God had told him quite plainly in chapter 9 verse 25, that Jerusalem would be rebuilt but in times of trouble.

And now he was seeing it. He was beginning to realize what it meant when God had said there will be war to the end. Because building the eternal kingdom of the Son of Man is a great conflict.

Well, the New Testament doesn't tell us anything different to that, does it? It's just as frank and unsentimental. What does Paul say to the Philippians? I tell you with tears, he says, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Many within the church, is what he's speaking about. Their mind is set on earthly things. God is their own bodies. They worship themselves, they worship their own agendas.

[20:14] Nothing's changed. What does Paul write to Timothy? Well, in the last days there will be terrible times. especially, he says, there will be a religion which has an appearance of godliness but denies all of its power.

Well, isn't that what we see? Of course it is. That's not faith as some kind of crutch to escape reality, is it?

That's biblical realism. The Bible tells us there are and there always will be until the very last day enemies enemies of the cross of Christ, enemies of the kingdom of God.

And scripture's not afraid to call them that. They're not colleagues with a different understanding. They're enemies of the kingdom of Christ.

And that's what explains Daniel's misery and his great perplexity. He saw what was at stake. He saw the very future of God's promised kingdom was on the line. He had seen a great vision of a

kingdom that would last forever and yet still in his experience there was so much struggle.

[21 : 25] Struggle to understand it all. He struggled to see how it would all fit. Don't you sometimes find exactly that same thing? Don't you find that although you know that the Bible tells you that God has promised these things, that he's doing these things, and although you trust God to be doing what he says, yet you just can't understand why the world is as it is.

You can't understand when you read the news and you see certain things happen. You just can't understand why at times, and very often sometimes, it seems that God moves in such a mysterious way.

Don't you find that? I find that all the time. Well you see we're in good company. Daniel, prophet of God, he was just as perplexed.

He was sorrowful. He was crying out to God. But there's no room for pretense, no room for fantasy or denial. Daniel is totally realistic.

Things look bad for God's kingdom, and they were bad for God's kingdom. He's a realist. But realism isn't the same as cynicism.

[22 : 37] Notice his response. It's clear from chapter 10, verse 11 that Daniel does not because of his perplexity start cursing God. He doesn't abandon God.

He doesn't blame God. He doesn't forget God. That's often what people do, isn't it, when they can't understand why certain things are happening in their own life or the life of the church or in the world. They become cynical. They start to blame God. They reject God. You've spoken to many people who once used to be part of a living church fellowship and have nothing to do with it now.

And you ask and it's, well, God never answered my prayer when my wife was ill. So I've given up on him. I'm not having anything to do with him again. Or something like that. It's so common, isn't it? But that's not what Daniel does. What does verse 11 say? He had humbled his heart before God. He'd set his heart on understanding. He'd prayed. And as we see, God is a God who answers prayer.

[23 : 41] And Daniel's realism in prayer leads to a wonderful revelation. To a revelation of a sovereign presence. And the rest of the chapter describes this awesome vision of glory and a revelation that explains what lies behind the many perplexities in the life of faith.

Experienced not just by Daniel, but by all of us, by all believers. believers. We see that all earthly battles, all struggles with enemies, whether personally in your life or mine, or together corporately in the life of the church, every such battle is related to one great battle.

The cosmic battle that's behind the scenes of all human history. The great battle for the redemption of the whole world through the triumph of the Son of Man.

man. A triumph, of course, which is ultimately absolutely assured. After his three-week time of prayer and fasting, Daniel looks up and he sees a vision of such glory it almost destroys him. His colleagues flee in terror. It's just like the Damascus road with Saul of Tarsus, isn't it? And Daniel himself is left absolutely prostrate on the ground so that he needs repeated strengthening just to get to his knees, never mind to his feet.

[25 : 07] He's dumbstruck at one point. Well, who is this being whose presence seems to be so overwhelming? Is it an angel?

Well, Daniel's had some encounters with angels before and they are very awesome and terrifying, but they've never had this effect on him. This is quite unique in the book. The language that describes this being in verses 6 and 7 is clearly reminiscent of descriptions of the appearance of God himself.

If you read Ezekiel's vision in chapter 1, if you read Isaiah's encounter with God in chapter 6, it's very reminiscent. The voice, the sound of his words have such power they absolutely overwhelm him.

This is a voice that commands the hosts of heaven, that commands these angels. Not surprising that three times Daniel calls him my Lord.

And yet verse 5, do you see, is quite definite, isn't it? This is a man. Well, of course, as believers who live after the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in history, there can be absolutely no doubt for us who this is, can there?

[26 : 26] listen to another description of a vision, this time to John the Apostle in the first century in Revelation chapter 1. Just listen, he says, and I saw, and in the midst of the lamp stand one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

The hairs of his head were white like wool and white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet though dead. Who is this man who radiates the glory of the presence of the one eternal God?

Well, of course, he's the son of man. Here is an appearance of the pre-incarnate son of God, seen by Daniel already in his vision, in chapter 7, receiving his kingdom in victory, but now appearing in person, right before Daniel the prophet, and speaking to him in answer to his prayer, and bringing him a revelation, a true word from heaven, a word to explain the mystery of these earthly conflicts, a word to strengthen his faith, to enable him to go on playing the part God had given to him in his plan of redemption.

[28 : 07] And what is his revelation, his word to Daniel? Well, his answer is both profound and wonderful. Essentially, it's this. God says to him, yes, oh man of faith, man greatly beloved, there are battles and sorrows and conflicts in your life, and in the lives of your fellow men and women of faith, but that is because, Daniel, you are caught up in my story.

You are called to be among the saints of the Most High God who inherit the kingdom with me and will reign forever. But that means that you share in the battle just as you'll share in the victory. See, Daniel, I must do battle with the powers of evil in the heavenly realms. I must face the full horror of the forces and the rulers in the heavenly places.

I must suffer so that my kingdom will be established. That's what Gabriel meant, Daniel, when he said to you that an anointed one will be cut off and have nothing, so that he might establish righteousness forever and deal with sin and iniquity forever.

And, Daniel, you and your people of faith are going to experience the reality of this heavenly warfare. You're going to experience it on the earth until the very last day, until every enemy is put under my feet, and until every dominion of evil is finally vanquished.

[29 : 52] Your story, Daniel, is explained by my story. Daniel, that's what the Son of God here is telling Daniel. Does that sound strange?

That's just the same message that the Lord Jesus Christ when he came to this earth gave to his disciples. If any man would follow me, let him take up his cross and follow me.

Daniel's given two revelations, isn't he, in verses 11 and 12, he's told why there's a delay in answering his prayer. And then in verse 14, the Lord intimates to him the coming revelation of chapter 11 and 12, that there will be warfare and conflict till the end.

And the explanation for both of these, for Daniel's present experience of struggle and for the battles and the enemies of God's people right to the end, the explanation for both of these things is the same.

It's all explained by a far greater conflict that's playing out in the spiritual realm. Where behind all our individual struggles and experiences, behind all world powers, behind everything in history, lies a realm of angels and of demons, of dark powers that in this chapter we're told control world leaders.

[31 : 18] Kings and princes. The prince of Persia who wars against God, the prince of Greece who lies behind the kings of the Grecian empire, the empire that is next in line to start persecuting the people of God.

What's being said is this, Daniel's personal struggles, his wrestling with perplexities and questioning and with real flesh and blood enemies, don't forget this chapter is happening at exactly the time of chapter 6 when Daniel himself is under assault from those others in Babylon.

But Daniel's personal struggles and the struggles of the returned exiles in Jerusalem, these are not unconnected. That's what this vision is about. They are all related to the one great cosmic conflict of the Son of Man as he does battle with the powers of hell to bring redemption to God's people, to bring redemption to the world.

And that's the revelation that the people of faith need to see in every age. We'll never make sense of the Bible, we'll never make sense of our Christian lives, our lives of faith today unless we see that.

That behind every battle for the gospel, whether it's personal, whether it's in a church fellowship, whether it's nationally or worldwide, behind every great battle for the gospel is the battle to build the kingdom of Christ which will be eternal.

[32 : 49] Every little battle that you and I or anybody is involved in is part of the great onward march of God's plan of redemption. Again, that's just the plain teaching of the New Testament.

There's nothing far fetched about that. Listen to Paul in Ephesians 6. Our struggle, he says, is not against flesh and blood, but it's against the rulers, the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

You see, that's what Daniel's seeing here. He's seeing in this vision painted in bright colors just what Paul is saying in plain words 500 years later.

And here's the point. This was a crucial stage in the history of God's plan of redemption. It was a new beginning. It was the end of the exile. It was the return to the land.

God's people being brought back to their own land under God's rule with a temple, with a priesthood, with the teaching of God's word. It was the last great movement of God's plan of redemption before the Messiah would come.

[34 : 02] And always, always, the greater the push for the kingdom of God, the greater the opportunities for building the kingdom of Christ, the greater the conflict in the heavenly realms.

That's what explains Daniel's own persecutions in Babylon and the opposition that was in Jerusalem. The powers of the dark world seeking to frustrate and stop this onward movement.

That's what explains the extraordinary outbursts of demonic activity in the beginning of the ministry of our Lord himself. Demons and opposition coming out everywhere at a critical onward movement in the history of the kingdom of Christ.

That's what explains the relentless opposition and persecution that you read all the way through the Acts of the Apostles. Just read that book. Paul says to the Corinthians, a wide door of effective work is opened unto me, but he goes on to say, and there are many adversaries.

Well, of course. You see, that's still true in our own experience. You know that. For our struggle is not against just flesh and blood.

[35 : 20] Yes, there are real enemies of flesh and blood, and for most of us there are real enemies in our own flesh and blood, aren't there? We've got plenty of struggles with the world and the flesh and the devil.

But listen, your struggles are not unconnected to mine, nor are they unconnected to the struggles in the rest of our fellowship, nor the present struggles in our denomination, nor the struggles of the persecuted church in Pakistan, or in Darfur, or in Nigeria, or wherever.

No, it's all part of the same one conflict. It's a sharing in the story of the building of the kingdom of Christ, which is being built today as it was then throughout the world.

And friends, Daniel needed to know that, and you need to know that. You need to know that in your struggles, whether it's struggles for purity in your sex life, whether it's in your struggles and your frustrations in trying to share the gospel with others, with friends, with family, whether it's struggles with coping with illness, or bereavement, or any of the other things that you struggle with that make you doubt God and his purposes and his love.

Friends, all of these struggles, they're all part of something so much bigger. fear. The great battle in the heavenly realms. And we need to know this in our griefs and perplexities, in our grief about the state of our denomination and the struggles of the present day, whatever it might be.

[37 : 06] These things are not because you've been abandoned by God. No. It's not that God has not heard our prayers. It's not that he's forgotten us.

It's because we are caught up in that great battle, in that great cosmic story of the kingdom of Christ. It's because, as Paul says to the Philippians, it has been granted to us that for the sake of Christ we should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake.

engaged in the same conflict you saw that I have, says Paul, and that Daniel had. And friends, the greater the opportunities for the kingdom of Christ to advance, the greater the conflict will be.

That's a law that is always the same in scripture and in our experience today. That's biblical realism. The life of faith will always be one of conflicts of war.

But we have a revelation, just as Daniel did. We have the voice from the glory of the Son of God who says to us, just what he said to Daniel in verse 19, O greatly loved, fear not, peace be to you, be strong and of good courage.

[38 : 25] We have that same gospel word to strengthen us, as it did Daniel. It was absolutely certain even for Daniel. Verse 21 says it's inscribed in the book of truth.

It's all in the book, says God. Nothing can go wrong. He'd seen it in chapter 2, the kingdom filling the earth. He'd seen it in chapter 7, the triumph of the Son of Man.

He saw here that the dark prince of Persia was repulsed, that instead Michael, the angel of God's people Israel, Michael was strengthened by God himself. Chapter 11, verse 1, I, God, stood up to strengthen Michael, and he fights for you.

And so he did. So that the pagan king, Cyrus of Persia, was no longer controlled by a dark power, but by God's angel. He uttered a decree to turn the people back to their land.

Daniel saw in this vision that God was in absolute control of all history, and of all the powers in the heavens. He received the revelation of the word of God's kingdom.

[39 : 32] He grasped the truth of it. And that's what renewed his strength. That's what gave him strength to go on doing what God had called him to do. Verse 19, as he spoke to me, I was strengthened, and I said, let my Lord speak, for you've strengthened me.

Yes, of course, the revelation of God from heaven, the gospel, is terrifying. It tells us that sin is such a dreadful thing that it upsets the whole cosmos, that it can't be put right without a shaking of the whole world and a great battle which will last to the end.

It tells us that we ourselves are utterly powerless against these dark powers in the heavenly realms that can control humanity, that can control nations and empires.

Yes, the gospel is terrifying. Because it's so realistic. It tells us about the world that we know, the world we recognize. It doesn't hide anything.

It tells us that evil is evil, that it's terrible, that it's powerful. We're going to have to read our daily paper to realize that the Bible describes our world.

[40 : 47] The gospel is terrifying. Because its truth exposes our pretense about the world that we live in. It's not a good world. It tells us as it really is.

But the gospel is also wonderful. Because it reveals that towering above the turmoil and the evil of the earth, and towering above all the dark powers, even in the heavenly realms, is a glorious, mighty sovereign, the Son of Man, the Man of Heaven.

And He is victorious over all such powers. Thanks be to God, says Paul, for He gives us the victory. He brings His heavenly victory to earth, and He brings it into the real experience of men and women, like Daniel, and like you, and like me.

And He does it in answer to prayer. That brings us to the last thing, a sufficient prayer. You see, because God's people do have such revelation into the realities of the cosmic truth of His kingdom, we have responsibility to play our part in the battle, and to bring the power of heaven to earth.

There can be no shadow of doubt in this chapter that we are dealing with a God who is utterly sovereign, can there? His voice shakes the heavens and the earth.

[42 : 19] His voice floors and terrifies human beings. His voice controls hosts of angels. This is a vision of absolute sovereignty.

Don't make any mistake about that. And yet, the mystery is that this sovereign God chooses to work through His people. We've seen all this already through the book of Daniel, how it's the stand and the faithfulness of men like Daniel and his three companions that proves to be crucial in how God's story plays out on the earth.

The personal stand of individuals may be absolutely crucial to the march of God's eternal purposes, but not just their public stand. Not just a public witness.

Like in chapter 3 in the fiery furnace. What this teaches us is that the private lives, and especially the prayer lives of the people of faith, can be just as crucial to God's progress.

Whatever this chapter teaches us, surely this is plain that God works in answer to prayer. Prayer is what brings the victory of heaven down to earth.

[43 : 32] Absolutely undeniable. God answers Daniel's struggles to understand in answer to prayer. And God grants Daniel's cries on behalf of his people, his prayer in chapter 9, in answer to that prayer.

God sends strengthening to Michael, the angel of Israel. God causes Cyrus to utter a decree. The prayers of faith are heard in heaven.

And they move the hand of the sovereign God. We can't deny it. We may not understand it. It may be a mystery, but it's absolutely true.

Do you see the implications of this? If the real enemies of Christ and his kingdom are not just physical, but are spiritual, if our struggle is not just against flesh and blood, but it is against the dark

powers in the heavenly realms, then we must fight with spiritual weapons.

And the chief weapon is prayer. It may seem to us that to do great things for God and to build his church against the odds, we need so much more, so much more strength, so much more power.

[44 : 53] But no, God says, prayer is the great weapon. Prayer is sufficient. That's why Paul says in Ephesians 6, you can't take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, without at the same time praying at all times in the Spirit.

And we, as God's people, have a responsibility to use the mighty weapon that he's put in our hands. We must, or we won't get anywhere, because the battle really and truly is in the heavenly realms.

Why is it that people that you know and love can't understand the gospel? Why is it they can't see it when it's so plain to us? The answer is in the heavenly realms, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4.

The God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So how do you overcome that?

You can't argue people into the kingdom of God. It's not a change of mind they need. It's a new birth. You must pray. And the Word of God, the gospel without prayer, is useless.

[46 : 06] That's why Paul says, pray, pray. All the time he's asking, pray that the Word of God might have free course. That's why proclamation and prayer are always inseparable in the New Testament.

They must be. Because it's prayer that brings the presence of the glorious sovereign God to earth. Do you pray for the Word of God to pierce the hearts of men and women, including your own?

Do you pray that every time we meet together and study his Word? Not just here on Sundays, but Wednesdays, in house groups, in prayer meetings, wherever, one-to-one?

There's no point in coming if you don't, because prayer opens heaven. Why do we face struggles and opposition to the truth in our Christian denominations?

The answer is, behind it lies a battle in the heavenly realms of demonic powers. And the only answer to these things is prayer. Friends, let this be an encouragement to us, but also a challenge.

[47 : 19] Our secret prayer lives matter. And our corporate prayer lives matter. They are seen and heard in heaven. God moves heaven in answer to prayer. In the new world, you know, we may be absolutely staggered, absolutely staggered when it's revealed just how much of the wonderful purpose of God happened on this earth because of the prayer of people in their 80s, like Daniel was.

And that would be encouragement to you if you're in your 70s or 80s or 90s. Your prayers open the gates of heaven. We don't have to wait, of course, to win our 80s.

Prayer is how we enter into the story of the kingdom of Christ. Because it's been granted for us not only to believe, but also to share in the same conflict as the apostles, as Daniel, as the Lord Jesus himself.

And also, wonderfully, to share in the victory. You see, here in answer to Daniel's pleas for understanding and his petitions for his people, we see the wonderful vision of the glorious man of heaven coming to presence himself on the earth by his faithful servant.

To tell Daniel the answer as it is written in the book of truth. The man of heaven come to earth in answer to prayer. Friends, that is the kind of wonderful God whom we serve.

[48 : 55] That's what he's like. He's always been like that. Right back at the time of the Exodus, we read God said, I have seen and I have heard my people's groaning and I'm come down to deliver them.

That was just a wonderful foreshadowing of the far greater deliverance. When God heard the pleas of a lost people, utterly lost, utterly helpless, utterly unable to save themselves.

And he, in his abundant mercy, sent his beloved son, the son of man, the man of heaven, to come down to earth, to be the answer to every prayer of all time.

To bring deliverance forever. To say to every single sinner who humbles themselves before God what he said to Daniel, fear not. Peace.

Be of good courage. Be strong. Our God is a God who loves to answer prayer. And his answer is always the same, to send his son, the man of heaven, to bring his heavenly victory to earth.

[50 : 07] He did it once and for all 2,000 years ago when he sent him to the cross on Calvary to reveal heaven's victory once and for all. But he's still doing it today.

He's doing it today wherever his people are praying like Daniel. Wherever there are people who are setting their hearts to understand. Who are speaking to God for men and women. God reveals his

son.

He reveals the victory of his son. He comes into the lives, the experiences of human beings, men and women, boys and girls on this earth. He does it in answer to prayer.

And no dark powers can prevail when God says let the light shine in that person's heart. But he does it in answer to prayer.

So don't be discouraged. There will be conflicts, perplexities, battles right till the very end, the last, last day.

[51 : 15] But know this. The man of heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, he is sovereign. His angels fight for us at his command. And he comes to bring that victory.

He comes to strengthen us with his wonderful presence and his word that lifts us up. He does that when his people pray.

Your words are heard, says God to Daniel. And I have come because of your words. Well, if we, like Daniel, understand this vision, we too will be driven to our knees.

And as we are, we will hear and we will see answers to our prayers. Because the man of heaven comes to earth.

It's the way he is. It's what he loves to do. So let's pray.