

X. Daniel, The Praying Captive

It is a wonderful historical fact that the men of prayer have always been the men of power in the world. I want to convince you about this. Some of you men--and I am glad to see such a large number of men here tonight--if you are arguing with some friend in the workshop, be sure and ask him why it is that the men of power in the world have been the men of prayer. Take only one instance: Where did they go always to find men for the forlorn hope in Havelock's days? They went to Havelock's prayer meeting; that is where they found men who had courage to come out for the forlorn hope.--Bishop Winnington Ingram.

That was a notable experience in the life of Daniel when he was ordered by the king while in Babylon not to ask any petition of any God or king for thirty days, under penalty of being cast into the lions' den. He paid no attention to the edict, for it is recorded, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and his windows being opened in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." Do not forget that this was the regular habit of this man of God. "He kneeled upon his knees and prayed as he did aforetime." What was the result? Just as expected. God sent an angel into the den of lions with Daniel and locked their mouths so that not a hair on his head was touched, and he was wonderfully delivered. Even so today deliverance always come to God's saints who tread the path of prayer as the saints of old did.

Daniel did not forget his God while in a foreign land, away from the house of God and its religious services, and deprived as he was of many religious privileges. He was a striking illustration of a young man who was decidedly religious under the most unfavorable surroundings. He proved conclusively that one could be definitely a servant of God though his environments were anything else than religious. He was among heathens so far as a God-fearing nation was concerned. There was no temple worship, no Sabbath Day, no Word of God to be read. But he had one help there which remained with him, and of which he could not be deprived, and that was his secret prayers.

Purposing in his heart without debating the question one moment or compromising at any one point, that he would not eat of the king's meat nor drink the king's wine, he stood out in that ungodly country a striking illustration of a young man, fearing God first of all, and resolving to be religious, cost what it may. But he was not to have a flowery bed on which to rest nor a smooth road on which to travel. The whimsical, tyrannical and unreasonable king, Nebuchadnezzar, was to put him to the test, and his praying qualities were to be proved. This king had a strange dream, the particular items of which passed from his memory, but the fact of the dream remained. So troubled was he about the dream, he called for all the soothsayers, astrologers and sorcerers to call the dream to mind, an impossible task, humanly speaking, and then to interpret it. He classed Daniel and his three companions, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, with these men, though there really was nothing in them in common with the two classes of men. Being informed that it was impossible to discover a dream like that, and at their saying if the king would tell the dream to them, they would interpret it, the king became very angry, and ordered them to be put to death. This sentence of death was against Daniel and his three companions.

But Daniel appeared upon the stage of action. At his suggestion the

execution of the rash edict was held up, and he immediately called his three companions into counsel, and he urged them to unite with him in a concert of prayer that God would discover to Daniel the dream with the interpretation thereof. In answer to this united praying, it is recorded: "Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven." As a sequel to this incident of the praying of these four men, Daniel revealed to the king his dream and its interpretation, and as a final result the king acknowledged the God of Daniel and elevated to high positions Daniel and his three associates. And it all came about because there was a praying man there just at a critical time. Blessed is that nation which has praying men who can come to the help of civil rulers who are greatly perplexed and in great difficulties, and who can be depended upon to pray for rulers of state and Church.

Years afterward, while still in a foreign land, he still had not forgotten the God of his fathers, and to him was given the noted vision of the "Ram and the He Goat," But Daniel did not comprehend this strange vision, and yet he knew it was from God and had a deep and future meaning for nations and people. So, of course, he followed the bent of his religious mind and prayed about it.

"And it came to pass when I even I Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then behold there stood before me as the appearance of a man.

"And I heard a man's voice which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision."

And so Gabriel made him understand the full meaning of this remarkable vision. But it came in answer to Daniel's praying. So puzzling questions may often find an answer in the closet. And as elsewhere, God employs angelic intelligences to convey information as to prayer answers. Angels have much to do with prayer. Praying men and the angels of heaven are in close touch with each other.

Some years thereafter, Daniel was studying the records of the nation, and he discovered that it was about time for the seventy years of captivity of his people to end. So he gave himself to prayer:

"And I set my face to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. And I prayed unto the Lord, and made confession."

Then follows the record in those Old Testament Scriptures of Daniel's prayer, so full of meaning, so simple in its utterances, so earnest in its spirit, so direct in its confession and requests, worthy of being patterned after.

And it was while he was speaking in prayer that the same archangel Gabriel, who seemed to have a direct interest in the praying of this man of God, "being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening sacrifice, and he informed me and talked with me," and then gave him much desired information valuable to Daniel.

The angels of God are much nearer us in our seasons of prayer than we imagine. God employs these glorious heavenly intelligences in the blessed work of hearing and answering prayer, when the prayer, as in the case of Daniel on this occasion, has to do with the present and

future welfare of His people.

One other incident on the prayer line in the life of this captive man in Babylon. Another revelation was made to Daniel, but the time of its fulfillment appeared to be far in the future. "In those days, I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine into my mouth till the three whole weeks were fulfilled."

It was then that he had a very strange experience and a still stranger revelation was made to him by some angelic being. It is worth while to read the scripture account:

"And behold a hand touched me, which set me on my knees, and upon the palms of my hands.

"And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright, for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling.

"Then he said unto me, Fear not, Daniel; for from the first day that thou didst set thy heart to understand and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.

"But the Prince of the Kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days; but lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, and I remained there with the kings of Persia."

What all this means is difficult to comprehend, but enough appears on its face to lead us to believe that the angels in heaven are deeply interested in our praying, and are sent to tell us the answers to our prayers. Further, it is very clear that some unseen forces or invisible spirits are operating to hinder the answers to our prayers. Who the Prince of Persia was who withstood this great angelic being is not divulged, but enough is revealed to know that there must be a contest in the unseen world about us between those spirits sent to minister to us in answer to our prayers and the devil and his evil spirits who seek to defeat these good spirits.

The passage furthermore gives us some intimation as to the cause of delayed answers to prayer. For "three full weeks" Daniel mourned and prayed, and for "one and twenty days" the divinely appointed angel was opposed by the "Prince of the Kingdom of Persia."

Well was it for praying Daniel that he had the courage, fortitude and determination to persist in his praying for three weeks while the fearful conflict between good and bad spirits was going on about him unseen by mortal eyes. Well will it be for us if we do not give up in our praying when God seems not to hear and the answer is not immediate. It takes time to pray, and it takes time to get the answer to prayer. Delays in answering prayer are not denials. Failure to receive an immediate answer is no evidence that God does not hear prayer. It takes not only courage and persistence to pray successfully, but it requires much patience. "Wait on the Lord and be of good courage; and he shall strengthen thy heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."