

Deep Creek Anglican Church

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“Unseen Opposition, Certain Help” –Daniel 10

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Well, you wouldn't believe it, but the start of this sermon has a slide that says, “**just one thing after another.**” I wonder whether in your life you've said that about yourself or you've said that about someone else, with compassion, that it just seems to be one thing after another. We might say that about the tech here but, you know, I think it's kind of small potatoes really.

For Daniel here in chapter 10 he is feeling that exact feeling. You and I know what it's like when you look at someone's life and you see that someone is unwell, and then something with their finances happens and then something happens with one of their children... there just seems to be one thing after another.

On the world stage we see it when a country just seems to be getting back on its feet and then there's a natural disaster, it's just one thing after another and we feel like they just can't catch a break.

Have you ever said that? Have you ever said that about yourself, even said that about someone else? Well Daniel's in that moment, because he's had revelation that says, Well, you will have 70 years in exile from Jerusalem, in Babylon. Your people will get to return. But then it's going to be one thing after another in rebuilding the temple. You will face opposition. It will be rebuilt in times of trouble, it says in chapter nine. Then, when you finally get the altar rededicated the kingdom of Greece will rise and the high priest will be killed. Instead of 70 years, outside of your homeland, it will be 70 sevens. It's going to be one thing after another.

During the week, I was chatting with someone and she and I were talking about the message of, not 70 but 490, and she said, If life is just going to be this 70 sevens, if we're in the middle of that if I haven't just got 70 to wait, but in fact it's going to be one thing after another, I don't know if I can do it. As a Christian, I'm exhausted. And my question for her and for myself was, is God good enough? Good enough in the midst of it and at the end of it, to keep us going?

Our message today has the title, “**Unseen Opposition, Certain Help**”. And we're looking at some things that might be a little uncomfortable or perhaps just very introductory for you that you kind of get a taste of something and you think, but I don't understand and I need to know more.

Well, if there's one thing that I can ask you to take away from this sermon today, it is this – **There is stuff going on that you don't know about.** I think we've been encouraged to kind of do that in our interactions with people to keep that in our minds when we think oh, be kind, everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about right, and it actually is so useful to us to think that way. This stuff going on that you don't know about. If you are a parent, or you've looked after children, or you've been in a family context, and there's a child who is really unhappy, and the parent or you as the carer, are kind of grasping at straws what's going on. When you finally see the tooth, the tooth

coming through, or when they finally actually spike a fever. You go okay, there was something going on that I didn't know about.

Or you get rejected for a job, and you see eventually when the person is the new person takes on the role that it was an internal appointment. And you're like, Oh yeah, okay, there was something going on that I didn't know about – it actually helps you, right?

Well in the same way as in the affairs of human beings, in the spiritual world there is stuff going on that you and I don't know about. And it's easy for us to complain and to say, "God, what are you doing, why aren't you doing this that and the other thing", and that happens all the time! That's why we've got the prophets like Jeremiah explaining why the exile took place. You could look at God and say, "God, you have left your people." But the prophet said, "ha, there's stuff going on that you don't know about. You were rebellious and this is the fulfillment of God's promise of judgment if you were not faithful to Him. There's something going on that you don't know about."

Take the book of Job as another example. The Wisdom literature of Job which says, actually this righteous man who suffered, there was something going on that he didn't know about, and that his friends didn't know about. So when they spoke, it was just like hot air because they hadn't seen what was going on.

Daniel, and those who would be just around his time and a little after it, would look at the attempt to rebuild the temple when Cyrus the king of Persia had said that they could return, and they would wonder, why is there opposition? Why is this not coming together? And Daniel has received revelation, "there's something going on that you don't know about".

And then of course as we look at our text today, we see that Daniel himself has been praying and fasting for three weeks. That is way beyond our perseverance, right? We're super comfy here." But Three weeks? There was something going on, that he didn't know about.

So, from verse 10 (of Daniel Chapter 10):

¹⁰A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. ¹¹He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.

¹²Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.

But something was going on that you didn't know about

¹³[T]he prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia.

Now, if you're reading this for the first time, this is the first time you sort of come into the book of Daniel, perhaps even into the Scriptures themselves the Bible. You might think, ah, there is a man,

and he has been in a human battle with the rulers of these empires. But we've already seen information in this passage that tells us this is no ordinary man. He is there,

dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz round his waist. ⁶His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.

This is a divine figure or a divine messenger. And so in that context, and in other places in the Old Testament, it helps us to see this when they're speaking of princes of the kingdom of Persia, Michael, one of your princes, the prince of Greece, actually, it's speaking of spiritual beings, spiritual beings with some sort of authority over a nation or a territory, or an empire. There is, yes, a human leader, and they are acting from their will. But there is an interplay with an unseen realm of spiritual authority over those empires.

There is an unseen realm of spirit beings who actually have been created by God with authority in and responsiveness to human affairs.

Now, this feels like a big curveball, right? We're sort of going along yeah we know, "Babylon, Media Persia, Greece" we got Belshazzar and Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar... ok. And now suddenly those human kings have a counterpart in the spiritual realm. And it can be pretty scary.

When I was working at Ivanhoe girls, we had classic staff Christmas party on a boat on the Yarra. A booze cruise. Like truly there was hardly any food, an open bar, people packed in there and of course, you know, there ain't no party like a school staff party because a school staff party is mandatory. Right, so you're stuck there, and you're trying to get outside, you know there's a tiny deck at the back. Anyway, so I have these conversations with people who are more "open", for some reason. In that context, as we're cruising (and four hours!) the conversation starts to turn to more personal things and someone talks about ghosts, and they say, "Ah, Megan, you're the chaplain, what do you think? Do you believe in ghosts?" I said, "Look, I don't really know that I believe in ghosts. But I do believe in evil spirits."

Wow. They couldn't believe it. Obviously I'd come across as an extremely rational, reasonable person up until that point. Some were saying, really, I don't believe it. But the person who asked me said "I'm terrified now". And you know, probably "emotions were heightened" at that time, but it can be terrifying.

But this is exactly what we're seeing here, not evil spirits on the level of one to one, or the individual that we might see in Jesus' ministry. But here we're seeing the presence of protective spirits, or patron angels over nations, empires, territories, and we're seeing the existence of for the first time really clearly in the Old Testament of angelic warfare in the unseen spiritual realm in the heavens.

Now, if we went back to the start of the Old Testament, we would see no overt teaching of the creation of invisible spiritual beings, but we would see their presence already there. So, you might remember in Genesis Chapter One, when God says, "Let us make humankind/human beings in our image" and scholars over time have said, "well, it's this kind of Trinity language, that we're seeing God's speaking in the plural because it's Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Well, it's not super likely because that wasn't very clear in the Old Testament. Is this, then, God speaking in the royal "we", you know, "we are not amused". Let us make humankind, let us make human beings.

But a lot of scholars actually see that at this time it is God speaking to the Divine assembly of created spiritual beings that are with him at that time. And you might think, we've got nothing to prove that, Megan, we've got nothing!

Well, as soon as you head into Genesis Three, you've already got the presence of unexpected spiritual opposition, as well as angels who do God's bidding. You have this serpent, speaking to Eve and to Adam. And then you have an angel, guarding the entrance or exit to Eden, with the flaming sword when Adam and Eve are expelled. So there's already something there that we don't have the explanation for how that happened.

Then you get to Genesis six. And it's okay if you don't know this material, it may be that it will awaken a hunger for you to read it. In Genesis Six you see a story about the sons of God, and the daughters of men. And it seems that they are some sort of unusual spiritual creatures who have children with humans. Sure, it's beyond our western sensibilities, but it's there!

Sons of God is a phrase that's clearly understood in ancient translations and interpretation of the Hebrew of Genesis, to be angels. They have, by this point (and we knew this already) turned against God. They've started to use their own free will, just like you and me, to run their own show.

And so at the end of what we call the primeval history in Genesis, 10 and 11, we have the scattering of the nations at the Tower of Babel. Now I don't know if you remember all the way back, Daniel Chapter One, right, we said Daniel's here in Babylon, and it actually uses the name, the plain of Shinar. So this is placing him right back at the Tower of Babel. And all of this is happening again. The nations are raging against God, like it says in Psalm Two, again.

And so when we see Genesis 10 and 11, that the people trying to build a tower. The tower of Babel, up to heaven and God comes down and scatters them and changes the language. And actually, that is the, the star of all the different nations of the world. There was an understanding behind that, that we see in Deuteronomy 32 If you want to and you can turn there, you're welcome, but I'll read it, describing this moment, Deuteronomy 32 describing Genesis 10 and 11.

*⁸ When the Most High apportioned the nations,
when he divided humankind,
he fixed the boundaries of the peoples
according to the number of the gods;*

Some translations say sons of God. Some translations say sons of Israel, because that would make it a lot easier. But actually, the nations listed in Genesis 10 are not connected to the 12 tribes, the sons of Israel - that was a different thing. Really what the most reliable texts here have here in Deuteronomy 32 is "sons of God".

*⁹ the LORD's own portion was his people,
Jacob his allotted share.*

And going on to verse 16

*¹⁶ [Israel] made him jealous with strange gods,
with abhorrent things they provoked him.
¹⁷ They sacrificed to demons, not God,
to deities they had never known,
to new ones recently arrived,
whom your ancestors had not feared.
¹⁸ You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you;^[a]
you forgot the God who gave you birth.*

As Israel started to interact with the deities of other nations, and the worship of other people groups, and you see that in the Baals, the Ashera poles, the eating of the raisin cakes to the Queen of Heaven, whatever it was. This Scripture tells us that they were actually engaging with evil spiritual beings who were over that people group. They were sacrificing to demons. I don't even like to say the word demon. And yet here this is, as some sort of foundation to how the world works.

And my summary is this, we need to know is on the earth, **there is no neutral ground in the Bible's cosmic geography** and we've only had a tiny little taste and really we don't know a lot, but we do know **humans are either in the kingdoms of darkness, held captive by partnering with worshipping two evil forces who are in opposition to God, or they're in the Holy Kingdom of God, supported by angels who serve his mission.** They're a holy nation, with God and God's messengers at this service, or they are in the kingdom of darkness.

Now saying this, you and I feel very much like Daniel. Daniel chapter 10 verse 16.

I said to the one standing before me, "I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I feel very weak. ¹⁷ How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe."

It might seem compassionate to look at other people and say something's going on that I don't know about I can treat them with mercy, but if there's something going on that I don't know about in the spiritual realm, and somehow I'm a pawn in a spiritual game, I don't want to have any part in it. I'm exhausted. *I'm overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, I feel very weak.* What am I to do, as a human being, if what is going on is so far above me?

The angel says to him,

.¹⁹ "Do not be afraid, (They always say that) you who are highly esteemed," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong."

When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength."

Peace, be strong now, be strong, is actually the message that God's people hear when they look into the unseen realm. It can seem terrifying. But in fact, God's agents, God's angels are on our side. They are here and this is the ministry to Daniel, not only to reveal, but to strengthen him. This is why Heidi and I have read Psalm 34 today. Because how is the *Lord close to the broken-hearted and save those who are crushed in spirit? The angel of the Lord in camps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them.* This Psalm is a "peace, be strong now, be strong" message and the book of Daniel and the Old Testament backs it up completely. Because what we need to know is number one, God is not a territorial spirit. God is not an empire spirit. What does Psalm 24 say?

*¹ The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;*

*² for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters.*

Even if God has set an unseen authority structure over the world and some of those spiritual beings are now opposed to God, and working for evil, it is not an equal fight. It never has been, ever. The Earth, the entirety of the Earth, has always been the Lord's, and the only reason why he would say Jacob is his allotted share is not because He's the territorial God of Israel who fights against the Prince of Persia and the Prince of Greece, but because He wants to use human beings to expand His kingdom throughout the whole world.

That's why we see Daniel Chapter Seven speaks in this language.

¹³ "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

God is not a territorial spirit, and actually the **Messiah will now have authority over every power and will inherit every nation**, the human Messiah Jesus the Son of God does the work that the people of Israel couldn't do in getting that rule of God, that holy ground, into every nation. Jesus now receives that authority.

We're going to jump to the New Testament now, because I want to tell you that Jesus has this authority, not just in the future, not just when He comes again and everything seems to be put right, **he has this authority now, by virtue of His resurrection.**

So if we were to look at Ephesians Chapter One.

That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked,

that worship language of the demons above any sort of power structure any empire, or any community, any harm. Jesus is far above,

not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Jesus is this Messiah from Daniel seven, and he has this authority **now** over the nations, over the spirits of every power, and every authority.

So I want to say to you, **we are not pawns in an unseen battle.** If you are a Christian, here today. **You live on holy ground.** God is the one who is over any territory, any empire, your home, your school, your workplace, God is there, and when you walk there every step is holy ground. When you look at the New Testaments description of the church, there's a lot that we don't understand, because we haven't understood this picture of authority and holy ground. So when the sinner is called to be expelled from the Church in 1 Corinthians to be turned over to Satan, it's because the Church is holy ground. (1 Corinthians 5:4-5)

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

You are the holy people of God, Peter says, You are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, you the church wherever you are you the Christian, wherever you are, wherever you go, is God's territory.

¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13 to 14)

You are a holy nation, and where you walk is holy ground. And that's why, in Ephesians Six, where it talks about standing firm against the devil, it says, you stand your ground.

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood (There's more going on than you can see), but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

This is exactly what I've tried to paint a kind of grey picture of from the Old Testament but it's here in clear, full colour in the New Testament. Therefore, put on the full armour of God so that when the day of evil comes, and you've walked out your holy ground, you may be able to stand your ground. And after you have done everything - wherever you've gone, whatever you've done – to stand.

Now we don't have time today to talk about what that authority looks like how to walk that out how to take your stand, but I do want to say to you that it is the active application of the gospel of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Now that's not a conservative, don't worry about it, you know, Jesus is doing his thing and you just carry on as though nothing's going on. **No, it is active application.** That's why Paul uses that picture of putting on the armour - putting on righteousness, putting on truth, putting on salvation, using it to both protect and extend.

Now if you are confident in this sort of thinking that I want you to hear this as your permission this morning. If you've let that sort of be quiet in you, this is the time. We've hit the refresh. We know that we need to stand our ground in active application of the gospel and Christ's authority.

And we do take that authority and hear these words from Matthew 28, in a new way I think.

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-19)

You want to get started in walking out holy ground in seeing God extend his kingdom? You go make disciples of all nations, in the authority of Jesus, you baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son of the Holy Spirit and you teach them to obey everything - because then they become part of the holy nation of God, they are brought out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son he loves. It's active warfare on the ground.

Now I hope that there will be a time for us in the future to talk about how we do that one on one, both sharing the gospel and praying for and using authority to release people from powers of darkness. We don't have time to do that today. But I hope that this has awakened in you a hunger. Because you see that the world is fighting a battle that you might not have known anything about. But Christ has the authority, and we live on holy ground.

Let's pray.

Almighty God, we acknowledge your authority in this place that we are your holy people on your holy ground. And we want to stand that ground. Lord God, we ask of you to extend your authority into every home, every workplace, every school, every club, every cafe. When we walk in as your holy people in your power, would you make darkness flee. Give us words, give us actions, give us prayers, give us commands that would see your holy ground expand, extend, multiply in Doncaster East, in our suburbs, in our nation and beyond. We pray it in the name of the mighty one, Jesus Christ, who has authority in the present age and the age to come. Amen.