

Main Idea: Preparation for an encounter with God involves accepting two truths, based on Daniel's experience in Daniel 10:1-11.

- I. Preparation involves mourning, which happens when we are gripped by the truth about ourselves (1-3).
 - A. He needed it.
 - B. His people needed it.
 1. The Jews in Israel faced affliction.
 2. The Jews in Babylon faced apathy.
 - C. He gives us guidelines for helping people mourn.
 1. Fill your mind with God's truth.
 2. Exhibit emotion that is appropriate.
 3. View the situation from God's perspective.
 4. Choose to keep living for God.
- II. Preparation involves marveling, which happens when we are gripped by the truth about God (4-11).
 - A. He encountered a heavenly visitor (4-6).
 - B. He was scared to death (7-9).
 - C. He experienced the mercy of God (10-11).

The Bottom Line: It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

1. We must prepare to meet with God *daily*.
2. We must prepare to meet with God *weekly*.
3. We must prepare for the *ultimate* meeting with God.

Scripture Reading: James 1:19-25

"There once was an Emperor who was very vain. He loved to wear expensive clothes and tried to look as splendid as possible all the time. In his palace he had many rooms full of wardrobes and chests of fine clothes, and he liked to admire himself in long mirrors every time he changed, which he did several times a day. Cloth merchants and tailors grew rich by supplying clothes to the Emperor, and many beautifully colored and finely-woven materials were imported from far away lands for the Emperor to choose from. Many people used to laugh at him for his vanity, but he was too proud to notice."

So begins the classic story by Hans Andersen, *The Emperor's New Clothes*. As a child, I found the tale to be amusing. As an adult reading it to my children, I find it to be revealing. Pride does destructive things to people. The emperor, of course, is a worst case scenario.

Two swindlers came along pretending to be cloth merchants, and sold the king what they said was the most beautiful cloth in the world. But they also said that the cloth was magical, and was invisible to anyone who was a fool.

When the merchants "unrolled" their cloth, the emperor blinked for he could see no cloth, but thought to himself, "I cannot let them think I am a fool." So he pretended he could see the cloth.

He called his wife, his Chief Minister, and other court members to see the cloth. Of course, they could see nothing either, but so as not to be labeled fools, they praised the cloth's beauty.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this passage, see the Daniel series at WBC in 1996.

And so the story goes, one person after another playing games with the truth. Nobody wanted to hurt the emperor's feelings so they told him what they thought he wanted to hear, to his shame and not his good.

Until finally, a little boy saw the emperor riding in a parade wearing a garment made out of this magical cloth. While everyone else cheered at what was not there, the small boy shouted above the crowd, "What has happened to his clothes? The Emperor hasn't anything on at all!"

Andersen concludes his story with these words, "Then the Emperor sent for the little boy who had climbed the tree and called out that he could not see the clothes. He told the boy he was the only wise person in the whole country, for he was *not afraid to speak the truth* (italics mine). The Emperor promised him that he would be the Chief Minister when he grew up."

We chuckle at the thought of some vain emperor who was gullible enough to be hood-winked, but in reality we all struggle with the same heart problem. Pride, and specifically the kind of pride that makes us resist coming to grips with the truth about ourselves, and even more importantly, the truth about the Creator God who made us, who knows everything about us, and before whom we will appear.

Yes, the truth is this, and you won't hear it on Sports Center, or CNN, or from the host of voices that called for your attention this past week. The Bible says that the day is coming when each of us will stand before the Living God.

The truth is also that we must make preparations *now* for that inevitable day. How do we do it? How do we prepare for an encounter with God?

Daniel shows us. Preparation for an encounter with God involves accepting two truths, based on Daniel's experience in Daniel 10:1-11. Point one, preparation involves *mourning*, which happens when we are gripped by the truth about *ourselves* (1-3). Point two, preparation involves *marveling*, which happens when we are gripped by the truth about *God* (4-11).

I. Preparation involves mourning, which happens when we are gripped by the truth about ourselves (1-3).

As we come to Daniel 10, Daniel is an old man in his 80s. When the book began he was a teenager who had ripped from his homeland in Judah and carried off into captivity in Babylon.

There are some things we need to note about this book. In the Hebrew Bible it appears, not in the Prophets section, but in the Writings section. Chapter one is written in Hebrew, chapters two to seven in Aramaic, and chapters eight to twelve in Hebrew.

What's going on here? The book is communicating an important theme. God is sovereign and His kingdom will prevail. It may not look like it, not after what the Assyrians did to the northern kingdom of Israel and the Babylonians just did to the southern kingdom of Judah, but He is.

Daniel 5:21 "The Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men."

Revelation 11:15 "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever."

So Daniel reveals what the sovereign Lord is going to do to manifest His kingdom in the world. We meet the main characters in chapter one, which is Hebrew. Then we see

what's going to happen to the nations of the world in chapters 2-7, in Aramaic, which was the international language of the day. And then finally we see what the sovereign Lord has in store for Israel in the future, in chapters 8-12, written in Hebrew, for this is the language of Israel.

It's all under God's control. He has a plan for the nations, and for Israel, and He put it in writing through Daniel five centuries before Christ. That's good to keep in mind during this election year in our country.

This brings us this morning to Daniel 10. Daniel 10 is all about preparation. In Daniel 10, the prophet found out that a meeting with God was coming, a vision. There are four prophetic visions that God gave Daniel which he recorded in chapters 7-12. The fourth and final vision is the theme of chapters 10-12. What's intriguing is that God devoted a whole chapter, chapter 10, to prepare us for the vision itself which begins in chapter 11.

It's clear that God takes preparation seriously for His people. Before Moses could approach the burning bush, he was first instructed to remove his sandals. Isaiah had to have his sinful mouth cauterized by a coal from the altar fire before he was suitable to speak as God's messenger. Paul spent three days in darkness before God's messenger came. And now, before God privileged Daniel to behold the final vision, this man of God engaged in two activities of preparation.

And the first is *mourning*, which happens when we are gripped by the truth regarding ourselves. Daniel mourned for two reasons revealed in verses 1-3.

A. He needed it. Verse 1 begins, "In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel² (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war³. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision.⁴"

It's interesting that we're told again that Daniel was called Belteshazzar. That's the name Nebuchadnezzar gave him when he was a teen. It's Babylonian and means, "Bel, protect my life!" That may be what some called him, but it wasn't reality. Daniel, which is Hebrew, means, "God is my judge." That's been reality for Daniel for eight decades. The Lord God, not Bel, has been the key to his life.

And it was the Lord God who gave Daniel this revelation in verse 1. What was Daniel doing at the time? He explains in verse 2, "At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks."⁵ Why did Daniel mourn? He doesn't tell us, but he doesn't need to do so. He knows something that every godly man or woman knows.

When you are in the presence of the One who is holy, you become aware of things about yourself that you know are out of place. The truth is, He is holy, and on our own we are not. And if you are truly gripped by this reality, it will cause you to mourn.

So Daniel prepared himself for this revelation from God. He mourned for three full weeks. "Mourning" is a strong word, the word often used in connection with lamenting the death of a loved one.

² AV, "a thing was revealed unto Daniel."

³ AV, "and the thing was true, but the time appointed was long."

⁴ AV, "and he understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision."

⁵ AV, "In those days, I Daniel, was mourning three full weeks."

Daniel describes what else he did while he mourned in verse 3, "I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over."

So in preparation for the vision to follow, Daniel practiced self-restraint. He followed a meager diet, eating only basic essentials and drinking only water, and even refrained from the pleasures of personal grooming.

Why? Is there something wrong with good food and a splash of after-shave? No. But Daniel chose to deny himself legitimate pleasures so he might prepare himself for the greatest pleasure, an encounter with the living God.

In our day, what would happen to someone who mourned like Daniel did? Some people would say he went off the deep end, that he's a little radical. We're uncomfortable with mourning. We live in a society that buys in to Carly Simon's motto, "Haven't Got Time for the Pain."

We need a fresh reminder of what Jesus said. "Blessed are they that *mourn* for they shall be comforted (Matt 5:4)." The point is, there are times when mourning is appropriate. Daniel mourned because the reasons warranted it.

Have you been gripped by God's holiness and your own sinfulness and mourned recently? Daniel did, first, because he needed it. Second...

B. His people needed it. And why was that? For two reasons.

1. *The Jews in Israel faced affliction.* Daniel says he mourned during the third year that Cyrus was king. That's the year 536 BC. The prophet was in his mid-eighties, and had lived in exile for 72 years. In chapter 9, Daniel learned that God promised to return the Jews to their homeland after 70 years. God kept His Word. The first group of pilgrims, some 42,000, had returned to Jerusalem just two years prior in 538 BC.

So if some of the Jews are back in the promised land, why is Daniel mourning? First, because that remnant now back in Israel was facing affliction. As the book of Ezra makes plain, the Jews who returned faced great difficulty getting reestablished. Ezra 3 indicates that though they set up the altar and lay the foundation of the temple, the work was suspended because of opposition by the locals in the land, and the temple was still in shambles.

So Daniel mourned because his people back home needed it. A second reason.

2. *The Jews in Babylon faced apathy.* The truth is, though given permission to do so, only a meager number of Jews wanted to return to Israel. They had gotten used to life in Babylon. The economy was better in Babylon. The standard of living was better in Babylon. Even if God has opened a door for me to do something that will bring Him much honor, I prefer the safer alternative.

We understand the competing values. We battle them every day.

So Daniel had a double burden. He grieved because the Jews that did obey God and by returning to Israel were being hindered by enemies like Rehum and Shimshai. And he was grieved because many of the Jews just plain refused to leave their comfort zone.

John later wrote, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world (1 John 2:15)." But for Daniel's people, apathy reigned. So he mourned.

You say, "Why didn't Daniel return to Jerusalem?" Knowing what we know about Daniel, we can be sure it wasn't because of fear (he's already survived the lion's den) nor a desire to coast home in comfort. My hunch is, he would have liked to, but he was 85

years old. But more significantly, because of the platform God had given him as a leader in the administration of King Cyrus (see 6:28), either Daniel couldn't leave, or perhaps he felt he could do more good for God's people by remaining at his post.

We can learn a lot from Daniel. Daniel was so burdened that he denied himself life's pleasures and mourned. In so doing he teaches us something important.

C. He gives us guidelines for helping people mourn. When mourning, we must do four things.

1. *Fill your mind with God's truth.* That's what we saw Daniel doing back in 9:2. Listen. People who handle life's problems in a God-honoring way are people who have made it a priority over the years to fill their minds with Scripture.

A. W. Tozer once asked, "If God gives you a watch, are you honoring Him more by asking Him what time it is or by simply consulting the watch?" God has given us His Word, the Scriptures. When we face a trial, instead of bombarding the Lord with questions, resolve to fill your mind with His truth.

Do you have a plan for a daily quiet time with God, for reading the Bible, and then praying the Bible? If not, talk to your Sunday School teacher and ask for help. This church is filled with people who meet with God daily in His Word and would love to show you how.

2. *Exhibit emotion that is appropriate.* When it comes to shallowness, there are two types of people. The first type is the person who goes to pieces over the insignificant. The second is the person who fails to be touched by the significant. Daniel mourned because the situation warranted it (10:2).

Several years ago, while traveling on a van with a group of Christian workers, I had an interesting conversation with Don Bartlette. Don is an American Indian who was born in poverty conditions with severe physical complications (you may have heard his story "Macaroni at Midnight" on *Focus on the Family*). He's got a great sense of humor. I noticed how he laughed at jokes and jabs about his race, asked him about it.

He responded, "My people laugh a lot, even in the face of prejudice. My people have learned to laugh in order to hide their pain. When in the presence of white people who are hurting us, we will laugh. But when we're all alone, the laughing will stop and the real feelings will come out."

I learned that for Don, laughing is a way of dealing with pain. He's not alone.

How do you deal with painful realities? Have you ever wept before God? Not just *wept*, but *wept before God*? If my child is living in rebellion against God, I have cause for grief. If I have stubborn sin patterns in my life, it's cause for weeping before God. If God's name is being dishonored in my country, it's once again reason to weep before God.

And that's why our Wednesday prayer service is so vital. We need more of our church family to join us as we come corporately to God and pray for our wayward kids, and nation, and many other concerns. Everybody wants prayer, but becoming a vital part of the church's prayer life? That takes preparation, and we need more to join with us.

3. *View the situation from God's perspective.* Why did Daniel mourn? It wasn't for selfish reasons. It wasn't because he felt life wasn't fair. He mourned because God's reputation was on the line, and God's people were in need. And he went to THE Counselor with his pain. Again, Tozer once said, "What I believe about God is the most important thing about me."

One problem we have is that we often mourn for the wrong reasons and fail to mourn for the right ones. On the days we don't get the attention we think we deserve at work, or we get cut from the team, or we don't get invited to the party everyone else will be at, we get bummed out. But we seldom mourn over the grim reality that our unsaved friends are on their way to hell.

What's missing? We need, by God's grace, to learn to view life from His perspective. Again, that's why being in His Word daily is vital, for His Word shapes our perspective.

4. *Choose to keep living for God.* I like what Daniel did next (in verse 4ff). Do you know what he did? He got on with the life God had given him!

Frankly, there are times when you may feel like just giving up. Yes, Daniel mourned, but he didn't allow his mourning to linger into a pity-party. Nor must we. If we are alive, it means that God has a purpose for us. Every day, regardless how we feel, we must determine that we're going to live for Him, remembering the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13. As the song says, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus."

So how do we prepare for an encounter with God. Daniel shows us that preparation involved mourning, which happens when we are gripped by the truth about ourselves.

II. Preparation involves marveling, which happens when we are gripped by the truth about God (4-9).

God brought three experiences into Daniel's life to help him prepare for the vision which comes beginning in chapter 11. In each, we find Daniel marveling at God.

A. He encountered a heavenly visitor (4-6). Daniel describes his encounter in verses 4-6, "On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. His body was like chrysolite, 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."

It happened in early spring, on the 24th day of the first month, just ten days after Passover. That's when Daniel received his answer from God. Evidently he was on some kind of official business, standing with a group near the Tigris River in eastern Mesopotamia.⁶ Suddenly, he looked up and saw what he calls "a man," but this was no ordinary man. A gold belt? A face like lightning? Eyes like torches? Indeed, this "man" was a messenger from heaven.

Who did Daniel see that day? The commentators are divided. Men like Gaebelien, McGee, and Larkin say it was Christ, while others such as Ironside, Leupold, Archer, and others say it was a created angel. I'm not sure we can be dogmatic either way, and we would do well to heed the honest example of Lehman Strauss who confessed, "In 1948 I was very sure (that it's Christ); in 1958 I had reversed my former conclusion (and said it was an angel); now in 1968 I am not certain that I know just who this certain man is."

It is interesting to note the similarity between the man described here, and the description of the glorified Christ in Revelation 1:13-15. Daniel said the person was wearing fine, white linen, which was the attire of the priests. His body looked like chrysolite which some have suggested is a transparent stone like gold, and his eyes

⁶ Archer, 123

appeared to be flaming torches. The impression given to Daniel was that the body of this heavenly messenger was like a gigantic transparent jewel reflecting brilliant glory.

Have you noticed that in the Bible when we read accounts of heavenly messengers coming to people, the records are almost beyond description? We read the humbling episodes and realize there's so much we don't understand.

Notice the effect it had on Daniel.

B. He was scared to death (7-9). Verse 7, "I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them⁷ that they fled and hid themselves."

This reminds me of what happened to Saul's associates on the road to Damascus. They heard the voice, but didn't see the Lord. Likewise in 2 Kings 6 when Elisha alone saw the angelic host surrounding Dothan. Daniel's peers didn't see a thing, yet terror overwhelmed them and they fled to hide.

Daniel tells us what happened next in verses 8-9, "So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. ⁹ Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground."

The messenger's appearance had a double effect on Daniel.

1. *He lost his strength.* "There was no strength in me (AV)." His body went limp and he became totally helpless.

2. *He appeared to die.* The color left his face, and he fell with his face to the ground. The description is of a man who literally has been scared to death.

I must warn you, as I did in an earlier study, to be cautious when people start telling you about their encounters with angels. At present time, angels are "in" for our society. But many claims just don't match with what the Bible says. Yes, there are angels, and yes, angels have a ministry in our lives (Heb 1:14). Yet, it's very interesting to note that when people saw angelic beings in the Bible, their reactions were very different from those we often hear of today.

And Daniel is exhibit A. He felt like he was going to die.

Most of us don't have a very good idea of what it will be like to stand in the presence of God. Daniel 10 is the record of a meeting with God's messenger, if not the Lord Himself, and what happened? Daniel's peers fled, and they didn't even see Him, and Daniel went nearly comatose!

What happened next to Daniel is a picture of what God did for each of us if we've experience the miracle of the new birth. While Daniel was on his face as a dead man...

C. He experienced the mercy of God (10-11). Verse 10 records, "A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees."

There's the mercy of God! He picks us up!

Whose hand touched Daniel in verse 10? Most feel, even those who believe the messenger in verses 4-9 was the Preincarnate Christ, that the personage in verse 10 was an angel. The reason, as we'll see in our next study, is because in verse 13 this being says that for 21 days he was prevented by demonic forces from helping Daniel, until the angel

⁷ AV, "but a great quaking fell upon them"

Michael came to his aid. Certainly, the Sovereign Lord does not depend on the help of His archangels.

The angel spoke to Daniel in verse 11 with a message of mercy, “He said, ‘Daniel, you who are highly esteemed⁸, 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.”

God loves the entire world so much that He offered His Son as its Savior. Yet, in the Bible we learn that certain individuals are the objects of God's special love. Here the angel gives to Daniel a special identification and a special invitation.

First, he identifies him as "a man greatly beloved" (AV), “highly esteemed” in the NIV. David, in spite of his sins, was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14). John was identified as the apostle whom Jesus loved (Jn 13:23). And here, Daniel hears this encouraging announcement from an angel, “Daniel, you are greatly loved by God!”

Following this identification, the angel invites Daniel stand up and understand the vision to follow. He'll have more to say in preparation for the vision in the rest of chapter 10, and then the vision itself will come in chapter 11, and the response to it in chapter 12.

But the key word in chapter 10 is *preparation*. Daniel is being prepared for this special encounter with God, through mourning (as he is gripped by the truth regarding himself and his people) and through marveling (as he is gripped by the truth regarding his matchless God).

Now let's think about some implications. First, with a question.

If you knew you had an appointment at which you were going to meet with someone very special, wouldn't it be wise to prepare for that encounter? You know it would, and we do it all the time.

For instance, I find it amazing what a young woman will do to prepare herself for a special meeting with a young man in the front of a church sanctuary. She'll spend months getting ready for a twenty-five minute wedding ceremony. Obtaining the perfect dress, coordinating the colors of the flowers, selecting just the right music, and much more. She takes steps to prepare for the greatest day of her life. It's the natural thing to do.

So how much attention have you been giving to preparing for the most significant day of your *eternal* life, the day when you will meet God?

The Bottom Line: It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Those are the words of Hebrews 10:31. *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

Out of pride, the emperor with no clothes played games with the truth. I once talked with a man who did the same thing, for when I shared with him about his need for Christ, he told me, "I'm not interested in church stuff, but I've got a sincere heart. When I stand before God, He'll see that."

My friend, the emperor sincerely believed he was wearing a beautiful wardrobe, but he was sincerely wrong. Sincere, good people cannot stand in the presence of a holy God. Only sinners who have been clothed with the righteous garments of Jesus Christ can.

There are at least three meetings with God for which we must prepare ourselves.

⁸ AV, “a man greatly beloved.”

1. *We must prepare to meet with God daily.*

That's personal worship, and if we don't prepare ourselves, it won't happen. Pick a quiet place in your house, free of distractions, and set aside a time, and go there with your Bible. Pick a book and read the first paragraph or two. Tomorrow will be the next paragraph. Read it slowly, then reread it. Then meditate on it. What is the main point God was making through the human author? This is His Word.

Then move to application. What is God saying to you? What is He teaching you about Himself? Do you see one of His attributes, or one of His promises, or one of His accomplishments? Then respond in worship. And what is He teaching you about *you*? Is He telling you something you need to think about, or do, or share with others? Then respond with obedience, in dependence upon His grace in Christ.

I recommend finishing your time by singing a hymn of praise.

But it all starts with preparation. Get your clothes ready the night before. Make sure you carve out some meaningful time to begin your day meeting with God.

2. *We must prepare to meet with God weekly.*

That's corporate worship, and it takes preparation too. In many ways the whole week is preparation for the coming Lord's Day. We get to meet corporately with God! What an amazing opportunity!

What we do on Saturday night is critical. Spending some time in prayer, for your Sunday School teacher and pastor and those who will be teaching your children, for the Spirit to bring lost people to church and regenerate their souls. Then get some good rest, and eat a good breakfast, and begin to fill your mind with the Scriptures.

And get your kids involved. "We get to do something special today, gather with our church family and meet with God!"

3. *We must prepare for the ultimate meeting with God.*

God's Word says that man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment (Heb 9:27). It says that all have sinned and have fallen short of God's glory (Rom 3:23). It says that the wages of sin is death but that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus our Lord (Rom 6:23). It says that if we confess that Jesus, the One who died on the cross for our sins, is Lord, and believe that God raised Him from the dead, we shall be saved (Rom 10:9).

So in reality, we are totally dependent upon the grace of God in order to be ready to meet Him. We can do nothing in our own merit to prepare ourselves for that day. We need to put our total trust in the merit of the One He sent.

Mourning and marveling. That's the response of preparation. Mourning as we acknowledge our sin. And marveling as we consider who God is and what He has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ.

If you are not sure you are ready for that inevitable meeting with God, I invite you right now to confess Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. There is no other way (Acts 4:12).