

"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.

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 our world today is full of people just like him. People who are playing games and need to come to grips with the truth--the truth about God, the truth about themselves, and the truth about what it will be like to stand before God.

The truth is this. The Bible says that each of us will one day 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 a meeting with God? Daniel can show us. How did Daniel prepare himself for an encounter with God? We find out in Daniel 10.

***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.

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

I. Preparation involves mourning (1-3).

We need to be gripped by the truth about ourselves.

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 (4-9).

We need to be gripped by the truth about God.

A. He encountered a heavenly visitor (4-6).

B. He was scared to death (7-9).

1. He lost his strength.

2. He appeared to die.

C. He experienced the mercy of God (10-11).

Implication: It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

I. Preparation involves mourning (1-3).

**We need to be gripped by the truth about ourselves.

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 to say that God takes preparation seriously. Moses didn't rush into His presence, but first was instructed to remove his shoes. 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 before God privileged Daniel to behold the final vision, the prophet engaged in two activities of preparation.

First of all, his preparation involved mourning. He was gripped by the truth about himself. Why did Daniel mourn? For two reasons revealed in verses 1-3.

A. He needed it. V 1 begins, "In the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia, a thing was revealed unto Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar; and the thing was true, but the time appointed was long; and he understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision." What was Daniel doing at this time? He explains in v 2, "In those days, I Daniel, was mourning three full weeks." Why did Daniel mourn? First, because he needed it.

Daniel prepared himself to hear 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. He describes what he did while he mourned in v 3, "I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled."

To prepare himself 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 so he might devote himself to waiting on God. He was preparing himself for an encounter with God.

In our day, what would happen to someone who mourned like Daniel did? A lot of people would tell them to go see a counselor. We're uncomfortable with mourning. We live in a society that operates by the commercial motto, "I haven't got time for the pain."

May I remind you of what Jesus said? "Blessed are they that *mourn* for they shall be comforted (Mt 5:4)." The point is, there are times when mourning is appropriate. Daniel mourned because the reasons warranted it. First, he needed it. Second...

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

1. *The Jews in Israel faced affliction.* Daniel mourned during the third year that Cyrus was king, the year 536 B.C. 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 two years before Daniel's mourning.

If some of the Jews were back in the Land, why then was Daniel mourning? First, because the remnant in Israel were 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. 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. 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 Jn 2:15)." But for Daniel's people, apathy reigned. So he mourned.

You say, "Why didn't Daniel return to Jerusalem?" No doubt, he would have liked to, but remember he was 85 years old. What's more, perhaps because of his prominent place in the government, he was not to leave as were others. Perhaps he felt he could do more good for God's people by remaining at his post.

C. He gives us guidelines for helping people mourn.

Daniel was so burdened that he denied himself life's pleasures and mourned. We can learn a lot from Daniel. Daniel can teach us how to mourn and how to help others who are mourning. 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.

2. *Exhibit emotion that is appropriate.* There are two types of shallow 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).

A few months 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." For Don, laughing is a way of dealing with pain.

Have you ever wept before God? If my child is living in rebellion against God, I have cause for grief. If God's name is being dishonored by a pagan society, it's not a laughing matter. Does that mean we should be overwhelmed by our grief? No, thirdly...

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 raise we think we deserve, 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 facts that our unsaved friends are on their way to hell. The point is, we need to learn to view life from God's 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 dying. 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 (remember 1 Cor 10:13). As the song says, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus."

Back to the original question. How do we prepare to meet with God. For Daniel, preparation involved mourning. We need to be gripped by the truth about ourselves.

II. Preparation involves marveling (4-9).

**We need to be gripped by the truth about God.

God brought three experiences into Daniel's life in preparation for the vision which was to come. In each of these, we find Daniel marveling at God.

A. He encountered a heavenly visitor (4-6). Daniel describes his encounter in verses 4-6 (NIV), "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 was in early spring, on the 24th day of the first month, just ten days after Passover, that 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 (Archer, 123). Suddenly, he encountered a heavenly visitor.

Who did Daniel see that day? The commentators are divided. Men like Gaebelin, 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 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.

Why is it that in the Bible when we read accounts of heavenly messengers coming to people, the records are almost beyond description? They humble us. We read these descriptions and realize we're not as great as we're prone to think we are! Watch Daniel.

B. He was scared to death (7-9). V 7 "And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision; for the men that were with me saw not the vision, but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves." This reminds me of what happened to Saul's associates on the rode to Damascus. They heard a voice, but didn't see the Lord. And remember 2 Kings 6 where 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 (LB), "And I was left alone. When I saw this fearful vision my strength left me; and I grew pale and weak with fright. Then he spoke to me, and I fell to the ground face downward in a deep faint."

The messenger's appearance had two effects on Daniel.

1. *He lost his strength.* "There was no strength in me." He was 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 often very different from those we hear of today. Case in point--Daniel. He was emotionally overwhelmed.

Why do we minimize what it will be like to stand before God? Daniel 10 is the record of a meeting with God's messenger, if not the Lord Himself, and what happened? Daniel's peers didn't even see Him, yet fled, and Daniel was overwhelmed!

What happens next to Daniel is a picture of what God did for each of us whom He saved. While Daniel was on his face as a dead man...

C. He experienced the mercy of God (10-11). V 10 "And behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands." Oh, how great is the mercy of God! He picks us up!

Whose hand touched Daniel in v 10? Most feel, even those who believe the messenger in verses 4-9 was the Preincarnate Christ, that the personage in v 10 was an angel. The reason, as we'll see in our next study, is because in v 13 this being says that for 21 days he was prevented by demonic forces from helping Daniel--until the angel Michael came to his aid. Certainly, the Lord does not depend on the help of His archangels.

The angel spoke to Daniel in v 11 with a message of mercy, "And he said to 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."

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" (NIV "highly esteemed"). 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 amazing message 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. Remember, this entire encounter deals with preparation. Daniel is being prepared to receive a special vision from God. What a picture of the mercy of God! And just think of it. God extends an even greater invitation to us.

Implication: If you knew you had an appointment at which you were going to meet with someone special, wouldn't it be wise to prepare for that encounter?

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 facility. She'll spend months getting ready for a twenty-five minute wedding ceremony--obtaining the perfect dress, coordinating the colors of the flowers and selecting just the right music. She takes steps to prepare for the greatest day of her life. It's the natural thing to do.

How much attention have you given to preparing for the most significant day of your *eternal* life, the day when you will meet God? There's an implication we must not miss from Daniel 10. In 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. Recently, I talked with a man who was playing games with the truth. 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 those who are clothed in the righteous garments of Jesus Christ can. That's the truth.

Response: We've been talking about being prepared to meet God. The truth is, we are dependent entirely upon the grace of God in order to be ready. If you are not a Christian, you need the grace of God in order to get ready. If you are a Christian, you too need God's grace in order to live a life pleasing to Him. Let's sing a prayer to God and ask Him to enable us to see truth.

Hymn of Response: #381 "Open My Eyes, That I May See"

Let's bow our heads for a time of reflection. The truth is, there are at least three meetings with God for which we must prepare ourselves.

1. We must prepare to meet with God *daily*. That's personal worship.
2. We must prepare to meet with God *weekly*. That's corporate worship.
3. We must prepare for the *ultimate* meeting with God.

Are there barriers that are hindering your daily meeting with God? Do you need to put more of a priority on spending time reading God's Word and praying on a daily basis. Ask God to help you do this.

Do you prepare yourself to meet with God weekly? Were you prepared this morning? Did you come to this Lord's day with an expectation that you were going to worship the Lord? If not, confess that to him. Determine today that from now on you will give priority to worshipping God on the Lord's day.

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

Response time in Prayer

It's a wonderful thing to have assurance that Christ has prepared you for the coming meeting with God. Fanny Crosby wrote a hymn that speaks of this "blessed assurance."

Worship through Singing: #345 "Blessed Assurance"