

Be still and know that I am God – the way of power

Psalm 131, Daniel 2:1-19

Have you ever wondered exactly what it means to be saved? Or just *how* saved we are when we become Christian...? Or if some Christians are more saved than others? That may sound a bit silly, but actually there's a serious point here. After all, we don't suddenly become perfect, just because we're born again. We still face problems and challenges. We can still on occasion behave badly ... and things can still happen that throw us into turmoil and doubt ... or even terrify us. And other Christians can seem so much better than us, can't they? No problems, and they seem to have all the answers – even worse, they can keep trying to tell us where we've got it wrong!

I'm a big fan of Jane Austen, and one of her characters, Emma, is always trying to 'fix' the lives of others by match-making. This is a lady whose motives are good, but time and again she gets it disastrously wrong, with potentially devastating results for everyone, herself included. Sometimes, I think, we can all be a bit like that. We want to fix things, so we charge in, guns blazing ... but we can't see the whole picture, and the results can be disastrous. A mess... which could have been avoided if we'd only listened to God.

At our mid-week meeting the week before last we looked at the opening verses of Daniel 2, and what it's saying is so important that I felt God was calling us to look at it some more today. So, a few preliminary points before we look at the text. First off, from the moment we give our lives to Christ, we come under His shield, and the Holy Spirit comes alongside us – to teach, heal, and free us from all the things damaging our lives ... for example, things we're involved in that we shouldn't be, addictions, past experiences, rejection, memories, generational curses ... the list goes on and on. The work of the Spirit is to conform us to Christ, that we might be set free and become fully what God has made and intends us to be – and so that God can use us. God does this gradually and as we respond, in obedience. But He never goes too fast, or at a pace we can't bear. To see the fruits of the Spirit in our lives, we need to respond to His leading and obey.

Inevitably we'll all face challenges in life – and sometimes these will be to test us; sometimes to bring to light problem areas that need to be addressed, and that we've been avoiding; and sometimes because God's doing something infinitely bigger, as with Daniel in our reading, and what we are called to go through, in faithfulness, is part of the saving, transformative and healing work that He's doing for others. But whatever it is we're going through, if we let Him, God helps and directs us, and gives us strength.

Even so, sometimes things can happen that knock us completely off balance and that we can't handle. Things for which, humanly speaking, in fact, there doesn't seem a solution – and this was the situation Daniel faced, here in chapter 2.

When something like this happens, the temptation for all of us is to panic, and then rush in to try and fix things. Which is 100% wrong. God loves us and knows what is happening already, and He wants to help – more importantly, He has the answer. But He won't usually intervene, unless we ask Him. There are many different ways of prayer, but I would suggest that the first thing we need to do when something awful or frightening happens, is not to run round like a headless chicken – obviously – but

instead, like Daniel, to seek God's presence, and tell Him the problem. Ask Him to fix it, of course, but then **be still**, trusting that He's heard and has got everything in hand.

Why is that important? The answer's simple. In God's presence we find everything we need – power, peace, safety, healing, understanding ... direction. All of which He wants to give, but which we can only receive when we're still and listen. And as we learn to dwell in God's presence like this, and become conformed to Christ and to His will, so the Spirit can increasingly work through us in power. **The stillness grounds action.**

So, back to Daniel. Here in chapter 2, Daniel found himself faced with a massive problem. Because the magicians, sorcerers, diviners and Chaldeans had been unable to tell Nebuchadnezzar what he'd dreamed, the King decreed that they were all to be executed – literally, to be torn limb for limb. Very unpleasant. Now as we discovered in our Bible study last week, the Babylonians were very superstitious, and things such as magic, divination, sorcery, astrology were believed to be incredibly powerful. Nebuchadnezzar hadn't just summoned a bunch of fortune tellers and mediums – he'd sent for the Babylonian intellectual elite, the wise men! And it was to this group that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah had been apprenticed ... specifically to learn the language and practices of the Chaldeans, who were the elite of the elite. They were student 'wise men'.

But the wise men had been exposed as not so 'wise' after all, because they'd failed!

On every count, this was a disaster. In Babylonian culture, dreams were seen as very important. It was believed that they were a way the gods and spirits talked to people. And the Chaldeans especially were believed to be skilled at interpretation. We know, for instance, that they compiled massive manuals that covered just about every possible scenario that could happen in a dream – so that whatever happened, they'd got it covered, and could tell you what it meant. But the problem of course was that Nebuchadnezzar hadn't just asked them for the interpretation, he asked them to tell him what it was he'd dreamed. In case you're wondering, probably because he'd forgotten – because in Babylon, not to be able to remember a dream was really bad news, because it meant that the spirits were displeased. So this was a king with a mega problem, and the likelihood is, he was scared.

But for all their learning, the wise men couldn't help. As they not unreasonably pointed out, to tell someone else the details of his own dream was utterly impossible. And it was because of this that Nebuchadnezzar sentenced them all to death - including the students, who were still in training and hadn't been there. V.13, we read that the executioners 'looked for Daniel and his companions to execute them'.

How unfair was that – but what did Daniel do? Did he panic and run away, protesting that it was a breach of his human rights? Did he go to the library and trawl through the books – the dream manuals – for an answer? No, with absolute trust in God, he asked the king for time, and then he went and asked his friends to pray. And God responded. Not immediately, but in the night He sent Daniel a vision - not a dream, mark you, but a direct encounter with Himself, which to the Babylonians would have been unthinkable - and in the vision, God revealed both the king's dream and its interpretation. So Daniel and his friends survived!

Let's make no mistake, this was a planned demonstration by God of His power and of the complete failure of magic. It hadn't just happened. God had orchestrated this situation precisely for this purpose – that, through Daniel, the Babylonians might see and know the reality of His power. And God could do this because He had trained and knew His man, He knew how Daniel would react ... but also because Daniel, for his part, was 100% faithful. He may have been in Babylon, but His allegiance to God never wavered.

I imagine that, in this reading, we can all see parallels to the world situation today, and hopefully feel reassured that God *is* in control. But there's equally a calling to us here to be faithful. God worked through Daniel and his friends, and He wants to work through us today, that His light may be poured out into the world. The lesson for us here is that when disaster strikes, or we're afraid, rather than rushing in to try to fix things, we need, in quietness and trust, to go back into God's presence and ask His help – because it's in God's presence, and only in His presence, that we find guidance, direction, and power. It's that that we need – and then, on the basis of that, we need to act.

For all their learning, the magic formulae of the Chaldeans failed, and, for us too, there are no magic answers or special formulae we can use that will make everything miraculously right and restore order. But our God is a God of power. He's sovereign, and all things are under His control. God has seen the darkness over the earth ... and He's moving in power. There's a sifting going on, prior to His return – a last chance for those living in darkness to repent and be saved. As we live in the stillness of His presence, He covers us with the shadow of His hand. In that place we're both transformed and are safe – and from that place we become a channel for His power.

So whatever might lie ahead, strive to enter and remain in His presence, and trust and not be afraid.