

**Pastor Tom Mortenson**

**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**December 11, 2016**

**Daniel's Comfort and Ours**

**Daniel 10**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just again thank you for your grace, we thank you for your goodness and we thank you for the gift that we celebrate this entire month, the gift of Christmas, the gift of your incarnation. Lord, along with the gift of yourself you have also given us your word and you've given us the ability to make that a living word by the power of your Holy Spirit. And as we are again in the book of Daniel, I pray that we would have the presence and the power of your Holy Spirit as we open up your book, as we plumb its depths, we just pray again that your Spirit would accompany us, that you would again make us able to make this of lasting value. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.*

Have you ever gotten really, really bad news? Well Daniel did and he had been studying the scriptures and he knew from studying the scriptures, studying the prophet Jeremiah, he knew that the time of the Jews' captivity in Babylon was coming to an end. And so he's moved to confess the sins of his people. And while he is in prayer, he gets approached by an angel and the angel gives him some

very disturbing news. The nightmare that Daniel thought was coming to an end was really just beginning. There was war, there was oppression, and worst of all spiritual indifference was going to again overtake Israel. Daniel had been in Babylon for almost his entire life, having been kidnapped as a young man. It's now two years after Cyrus, moved by God himself, has issued this proclamation that would enable Jerusalem to be rebuilt. The 70 years of captivity at long last are coming to an end. But probably to no one's surprise, many of the Jews had grown used to life in Babylon. There was no real groundswell of Jews that were aching to leave the comfort of Babylon for what is now a new and different experience, that is a return to Jerusalem. This is the kind of stage that is set as Daniel is approached by the angel, and this is the angel speaking in *Daniel 9:25*. And he says to Daniel, he gives him this difficult news, he says: *"Know and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem, to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time."*

A troubled time indeed. That's followed by the vision that we're going to look at this morning in chapter 10. And Daniel receives a vision in chapter 10 that's not full of good news about a triumphant return to Israel and rebuilding of Jerusalem and the

temple. Instead it's a message that is full of conflicts and wars and kings rising to power who have nothing but hatred and contempt for the Jews. So we look at this and we say, okay, what does Daniel's plight, what does that have to do with us? Well, it's this. You see, God uses the circumstances of Daniel's bad news to speak to us when we find ourselves or others in a same situation. Chapter 10 in the book of Daniel opens up with Daniel realizing just how bad this news is. It says this in *Daniel 10:1*. It says: *In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar. And the word was true, and it was a great conflict. And he understood the word and had understanding of the vision.* Now to the extent that Daniel is able to understand the vision is the extent that he's filled with this existential horror and mourning over what he has seen. In verse 2 it says: *In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks.* Daniel is clearly in bad shape. But it's not for himself that he's mourning, it's for the kingdom, it's for his people. You've got to understand Daniel now is in his 90's. I mean, he's clearly not up to the task of rebuilding Jerusalem in any physical sense and so his task now is mainly spiritual. His task is to hold his people up in prayer. And Daniel is sick at heart because he knows what is in store for his people. So his mental and spiritual state sets the stage for

the next event that takes place. This is verse 4. It says: *On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris) I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightening, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude. And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground.*

Well, most scholars agree that what Daniel is experiencing is known as a theophany. And that is an appearance of the pre incarnate Christ. You know the average person on the street, you speak of Christ, they think Christ came into existence around 2016 years ago on Christmas day. We know that the scripture is clear that the Christ was the one who was present at the very beginning and through whom all of creation came about. John's gospel opens with these words in *John 1:1*, it says: *In the beginning was the Word,*

*and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. So Christ was that word. And 2,016 years, approximately 2,016 years ago, that word, that creative word became flesh and began to dwell among us. Of course that's what we celebrate at Christmas. The Spirit of Christ took on flesh and became Jesus, the Christ. And throughout scripture there are numerous times where it is thought that long before that Christmas day that the Spirit of Christ himself made an appearance on earth. You know, we covered this once before, the fourth man in that fiery furnace among Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego was thought to be one such pre incarnate vision of Christ, and again that's known as a theophany. And our text this morning is another one. Daniel's description of this man in his vision clothed in linen is very similar to a description we find of Christ in the book of Revelation. This is Revelation 1:13, it says this, describing him: *In the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head are white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.**

Well if you think this description is remarkably similar to

Daniel's description of the angel who came to him and again, we're talking about the Spirit of Christ. And Daniel continues in verse 10, it says: *And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come." When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and was mute. And behold, one like the likeness of the children of man touched my lips. Then I opened my mouth and spoke. I said to him who stood before me, "O my Lord, by reason of the vision pains have come upon me, and I retain no strength. How can my lord's servant talk with my lord? For now no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me." Again one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, "O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage." And as he spoke*

*to me, I was strengthened and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me." Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: There is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince."*

That's a lot of stuff. And there are two different directions that we can go looking at this passage. One would be to discuss the whole concept of spiritual warfare and that's certainly a valid place to go. We see right here in verse 13 a reference to this demonic prince of Persia withstanding the angel for twenty-one days until Michael comes in to help. And what it speaks loudly is what I have been saying over and over and I mean I think I sound like a broken record here, but it is critically important to understand that there is a war going on. And it is a war that's been going on for eons. And it started in heaven eons ago and it continues to this day, as I say it over and over again, it's a proxy war between two great kingdoms, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, and we are the ones that are stark there in the middle. We are the ones that the battle swirls around and we are the ones that are doing the battle. And Daniel is a classic example. I mean, he's like all of us. He's essentially clueless about these

wars that are raging just beyond his senses. And the angel's description that his 21-day delay was because he was locked in battle for three weeks with the prince of Persia, well, that should give us a hint, just a hint of the extent of that war. Abraham Kuyper once wrote this, he said, "If once the curtain were pulled back and the spiritual world behind it came into view, it would expose to our spiritual vision a struggle so intense, so convulsive, sweeping everything within its range, that the fiercest battle ever fought on earth would seem, by comparison, a mere game."

We actually get a hint of this. We get a hint of this in the description that takes place in 2 Kings. If you go to 2 Kings, it's describing the prophet Elisha and he's surrounded by this incredibly powerful Syrian Army and his servant is in a complete panic. We pick it up at 2 Kings 6:15, it says: *When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."* Those who are with Elisha and his servant, they were not human. And they were everywhere. You know, Elisha prays that God would open up his servant's eyes and give him a vision of what is really taking place outside of his senses. And we pick up



in verse 17. It says: *Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.* Elisha's prayer was that his servant would see life in the spirit world as it really is, as it's taking place right here and right now. And God in answer to that prayer, he kind of peels back the curtain and he gives him a vision of what is actually taking place. You know, I would love to be able to pray that same prayer and see what his servant saw, but my guess and my guess for all of us, the terror of that would be overwhelming. Suffice it to say that we are at war. And when you're in a war, there will always be what we call collateral damage. And part of living on this earth is knowing that that collateral damage at some point is going to impact every single one of us.

And there's another tact that this chapter speaks to as well and it applies equally to every single one of us, whether we are in the middle of a spiritual battle or merely just sitting on the sidelines. And it's how God cares for us when we are in the middle of that battle, when we are receiving the collateral damage. Daniel is absolutely devastated by the news he receives, but along with that devastating news comes three different expressions of God's love and his care for Daniel and they also apply to us. You

see, first the angel speaks comfort to Daniel telling him that he is loved. And secondly he touches him physically. And thirdly he encourages Daniel by opening up to him some of those aspects of spiritual warfare that he knew nothing about. So we see in this passage the Spirit of Christ talking to Daniel, teaching Daniel and then touching him as well. The implications for us are these: When the spiritual war and its collateral damage impacts us, God does the very same thing. First he tells us, he tells us that we are loved, he talks to us and says that. He says it to us through his word. And secondly he touches us. And thirdly he teaches us. Now you may say well, okay, fine, if I actually had that treatment, if God spoke to me and he told me that he loved me, if he touched me physically in some kind of way and finally encouraged me by opening up to me all that the kingdom of God is about in his word, then I could probably go through just about anything. Well but here's the catch. God does do that. And he does it now and he does it today and he does it in the lives of his people and he does it through his word and through his church. Christ first tells Daniel something he desperately needs to hear. He says it in verse 11, he says: *And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly loved."* You know, God tells Daniel in the midst of all of this bad news that he's receiving that he is loved. What's the first reaction that you have when you receive bad news? For most of us it's bewilderment followed by either guilt or anger. You know guilt if

we believe that God is angry at us for some sin that we've committed or anger because we believe that God could not do this to us when we've been trying so hard to lead such good lives. Neither reaction is proper, neither reaction is correct. And Daniel's a perfect example of someone receiving bad news who fits neither category. The Spirit of Christ assures him in the midst of this bad news that he is still loved by God. And God's word does that job every single day. And this is the job that God has now also assigned to the church.

Paul says in *Colossians 1:24*, he says: *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.* Now obviously there's nothing lacking in the efficacy or the effect of Christ's afflictions, I mean, his death on the cross we all know it paid in full the price for every one of his sheep. The only thing that's lacking in Christ's afflictions is his physical presence. Christ is not here. He's right now at the right hand of the Father in heaven. And that's what Paul is referring to. Paul is saying by his presence, by his life, by his suffering, by his caring, he is filling up Christ's absence. Well that's the role that we have now today, I mean, we stand physically in the place where Christ once stood. We are the body of Christ. In a literal sense we are his hands, we are his feet and we are his

tongue. And when someone is struggling and desperately needs to know that he or she is loved by God, how can they know they are accepted in the beloved unless either through God's word or through God's people they are spoken that love into their lives. And that's what God charges us to do. He says this in *Romans 12:15*, he says: *Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.* And in *Galatians 6:2* he says: *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.* See, the point is God still touches his people today and he does it through his word and he does it through his church.

Let me give you an example. I want to revisit an example I recently shared with you. I was reminded of this a few weeks back. My daughter Lydia and her sister Abby flew out from Colorado to surprise Bethany for her baby shower and Lydia was on her way back to Colorado Springs, and she was carrying with her a gift that Sarah had made for her. It was a piece of artwork. It was an inscribed piece of artwork and it simply had the statement on it in quotes, "I am a child of God." There's a history here that bears repeating. I've spoken of this before. Because that piece of artwork represented in a very unique way a way in which the church spoke for Jesus. In this case Jesus spoke to my daughter Lydia through his word, through the church by means of a complete stranger. Now I shared with you all back, this was about a year or

so ago, a little more than a year, Lydia was in Jacksonville, Florida suffering from a deep, deep depression. And she was feeling as if God couldn't possibly love and care for her in the state that she was in. And she was in church on a Sunday morning. And she was trying to worship and she was locked in this battle with the enemy and she kept telling herself that God really, really did love her and that in fact he had a name that was written just for her in heaven because she was that special to him, and that's God's word at work. You know, the devil's not going to give up that easily and so he was insisting that she was simply a nobody before God. And during that church's worship service that morning, they played a song that Lydia had been listening to all week, and it had the lyrics that spoke God's word and the lyrics were: "I am no longer a slave to sin. I am a child of God." And she wrote me about the experience. This is what she -- I'm just quoting what she wrote to me. She said this: "I couldn't pay attention to the sermon and I was in a particularly bad spot emotionally and spiritually. The worship team started to play this song. I immediately perked up and was like, oh, okay, I love this song. I can listen, I can worship. As soon as I had decided this, Satan began to whisper to me, 'You're a child of God? So what? So are the hundreds of other people in this church. You know what? Make that millions, millions of other people in the world singing this song. You aren't special! You may be a child but you are one of

billions! How can you be that important to God?" She says: "That's when I tried to battle it with verses like God has a name just for me that he only knows in heaven, et cetera, but that didn't really work. So I just sort of went back into my slump feeling particularly small and unnoticed by God." She said she was locked in this battle with the enemy and when the service ended, everybody didn't just run out the door, the pastor gathered everybody in the congregation, he said I want to have a time of prayer. And during that time of prayer, a woman that she had never laid on eyes on before made her way to her side. And again Lydia writes. She says this: "She laid hands on me and didn't speak for a long time. Finally she looked directly at me and said, "Can I tell you something that I feel God wants me to tell you?" I said, 'Yes' and she said 'He wants you to know that he sees you. You are his beloved. You are his pearl and he sees and he loves you so much.' That's God's word. That's God's word working through God's people. Lydia said, she went on to say that God knew exactly how he made me and that he makes no mistakes and he made me exactly how he wanted me to be. She said she knew right then and there that God was speaking to her anxiety and depression and the feeling she had had ever since she was a little girl, that she was broken and damaged goods. Lydia went on to say this, she said, "This is exactly what you were talking about in that text, God uses the church to speak to us. I still can't repeat this story without

tearing up. I am thankful that woman let the Holy Spirit move through her. She couldn't have possibly known the thoughts I was having related to that song."

You know Lydia is -- she's doing fantastically well after she's moved back to Colorado with her husband and her little boy Jackson. And of course it figures, the one kid that I get to go to Florida stays there for a year and now she's left. And as she left she was given this artwork as I was speaking to and the artwork was put together by Sarah and given to her just so that she could remind herself that just like God had done with Daniel, God had indeed spoken to her. And he spoke his word to her and he spoke it through a complete stranger and he spoke it through the church. You see in God's economy nothing is wasted. I've said many, many times all things work together for good includes all things. That means the good things and the bad things and sometimes the awful things, 'cause even those things God can make work together for good. And one of the things that I said to Lydia about her experience is that years from now when she sees a young woman in the exact same situation that she's in perhaps in a church setting, she'll be able to relate to her like no one else can. You see, God speaks using the experiences we go through as a means of touching others as we see them go through the very same experience. I mean God says it is he *who comforts us in our affliction, so that we may*

*be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.* Now that comfort of God comes mainly today through his word and his church. You have no idea of the amount of comfort you might be sharing with someone as a part of a far greater picture that God is painting through his church. You know it was Ken Bontrager who said that he thinks one of the most important times for this church is the time that we spend right after the service ends and people are gathered around in pockets of small groups just kind of touching base with one another. That's sort of what was happening when this stranger spoke to my daughter and that's often times when God can speak to people through the church, and sometimes it's that way, sometimes it's more formal, sometimes it may be a counseling session or a prayer meeting but sometimes it's just people shooting the breeze. I know there's quite a bit of encouragement that goes back and forth between these folks and I see it and I hear it and I get encouraged by that as well. See I see it as just a continuation of what God was doing in Daniel's life. I mean God spoke comfort to Daniel and God speaks comfort today and we are privileged to deliver that comfort.

Now the second thing that happened to Daniel took place almost immediately after he received the bad news. It was then that the Spirit of God touched him. *Daniel 10:9* says: *Then I heard the*



*sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground. And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. You know, Daniel had the most appropriate response to the presence of the Spirit of God -- to the Spirit of Christ. You know what Daniel does? He falls on his face and he passes out. That's the right response. You know the angel reaches out and he touches him and he sets him on his hands and his knees then the angel once again speaks to Daniel and he's rendered speechless and staring. What does the angel do? He touches him a second time. Verse 15: When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and was mute. And behold, one in the likeness of the children of man touched my lips. Then I opened my mouth and spoke. See, Daniel needed more than just words. Daniel needed a touch from God. And again in verse 18: Again one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, "O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage." And as he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me."*

You see sometimes just a spoken word is enough to bring comfort and healing to somebody. You know Lydia's example speaks well to that, but sometimes folks need more than just words. Sometimes they need a physical touch. And the body of Christ demonstrates the love of

Christ not only through words but through deeds as well. Just last week Cyndi was dropping off a meal for Bethany and I was thanking her and she used that opportunity to say how incredible she found the church to be, how faithful she found the church to be in caring for them after Aedan's accident. She said it meant so much to her and she was delighted to be able to participate in giving back to somebody else. And I just thought about that and I thought what a marvelous things the body of Christ is and how it operates in that way, just simply bringing a meal to somebody who is struggling speaks wonders. And I need to give a shout out to Emily. She's doing a terrific job of seeing to it that people who are hurting receive the physical touch of something as tangible as a meal. That's the body of Christ doing the work of Christ. Jesus touched Daniel physically. And we touch each other every time we go beyond words to deeds.

You know I'm sure all of you have seen what's going on in the back of church, you've seen what we have now is a large hole in the floor. Well, you're going to be looking or you are looking at a concrete example of what it means to have a physical expression to the encouragement that words alone can't bring. And you all know this is a huge undertaking for us, but it's more than just putting in a lift. This is us as a church making a statement about our commitment to make the gospel accessible to everyone. And everyone

who contributes to this effort is doing their part to speak more than just words, and that is to speak deeds as well. James has this to say about words that have no deeds. He says in *James 2:14*: *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

Well here's my question for us this morning. Have you ever asked yourself what deeds can I point to that actually back up my words? We have no shortage of opportunities going beyond words into deeds, and all it takes is a willingness to get involved. I mean we just heard this morning about a warming station that's going into Port Jervis. It's designed to house the homeless and to shelter them from bitterly cold nights. You know we've already participated in a small way by helping pay the cost of the insurance they had for the first time this year but you see this, there was a whole lot of blank spaces on that, a whole lot of need for people to just put deeds to their words. Now you can volunteer to be one of those shelter monitors for one night a month or you could provide a meal for those folks. You know in our house for years now, there have been people who drive up the driveway who I don't know and who I

haven't met and I don't think I'll ever meet and they stop and they parked right in front of our barn and they open up their cars and they bring out bags and bags of clothes and they just leave them in the barn. We've become a drop-off spot for people that donate clothing because Janice spends hours and hours sorting through, going through all these different clothes then she brings them down to the Drew Methodist Church so they can be distributed to people that don't have anything. There are shut-ins like Annie Weaver who long to have a visit and there's always people who need encouragement.

One of the painful divisions that came out of the social gospel of the 60's and the 70's was this so-called division of care. And it certainly looked like churches were divided. I mean they either cared for the physical needs of the people around them and paid very little attention to their spiritual needs or they were very concerned about sharing the gospel and not at all concerned about physical needs. Anyone who reads the gospels has to understand that God expects us to be deeply concerned not about one or the other but both. Now listen to what God says in *Matthew 25:33*. He says: *"And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me*

*food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'* Then the righteous will answer him saying, *'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'* And the King will answer them, *'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'* I've grown weary of liberal churches pointing to conservative churches about how often they fail at the simple commandment that our King has made crystal clear to us. And I grow weary of it because much of it is rooted in the truth. There's no reason why the church cannot succeed in caring for the physical and spiritual needs of a community. I mean it truly is the mark of a redeemed people that they care for both.

And finally we see in our text this morning the Spirit of Christ teaching Daniel. In verse 20 it says: Then he said, *"Do you know why I have come to you?"* Then in verse 21 he says: *"But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth."* See the angel has talked to Daniel, he's encouraging him, telling him he is beloved, he has repeatedly touched Daniel physically assuring him that his presence is real and now he opens up to Daniel to teach

some of the deep truths of God's word. Verse 21: *"But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth."* Well here's the point. We today as Christ's church are charged with the very same thing. We are charged with what we have seen the Spirit of Christ do to Daniel and we are charged as well. We are to tell people of the love of Christ, we are to touch them physically with that love and if we stop right there, well, we've done them really no service at all. I mean Daniel knew everything he needed to know about a right relationship with his God. What did Daniel know? Well, he knew that his faith in the shed blood of an animal was sufficient to cover his sin even if he didn't know that that sacrifice was only a picture of the real sacrifice that the very one who was speaking to him would one day endure. It wouldn't be until centuries later that the Christ who appeared to Daniel as an angel would leave heaven itself, take on flesh as a human baby born to Mary and Joseph. You know, we have the whole story. We have the whole story that Daniel had just a little part of. We know that baby would go on to live a perfect life and then offer up that life on the cross as a substitute for our lives of sin. We know that it is by faith in Christ's shed blood on the cross that we appropriate the righteousness of Christ. *Romans 5:1: Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* By faith Jesus made a way for us to be righteous before God. There is no more important piece of information than

the one that we've been entrusted with. That's the gospel. Jesus told Daniel what he needed to know, no more and no less. And it wasn't the full gospel that we've been given but rather it was a broad based picture of what would happen to Israel in the near future into the kingdom of God in the distant future going all the way up to the return of Christ. But you know, our task is not nearly that complicated. We are simply charged with telling, touching and teaching the good news. With telling people about the love of Christ, touching them physically with that love, and finally teaching them what is necessary to get right with God. I just wish I could find a way to say this in a way that would get you more willing to speak up the words of the gospel. What I really want you to understand is that you can't -- I feel that people are so afraid they're going to mess up, they're not going to get it right, they're going to get stuck and somebody's going to ask them a tough question. You can't mess this up. Well you can but God's going to make it so that you can't. Trust me. Trust him.

You know Greg Gilbert in his fine little book *What Is The Gospel* points out that on the most basic level the gospel is represented by only four words: God, man, Christ, response. Just think of that, God, man, Christ, response. God created all things including you and me. Man has rebelled and put an impenetrable barrier

between the Creator and us. Christ became flesh to tear down that barrier by giving us the ability to become righteous through faith, and now God calls every single one of us to respond to his offer of grace. God, man, Christ, response. That's the gospel. That's what's been entrusted to every single one of God's children. And every single person who has come into the kingdom since Christ gave us the great commission has come into the kingdom because someone has loved them enough to tell them. You know, God makes that clear in *Romans 10:13*, he says: *For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"* You know Paul says belief comes from hearing, hearing comes from preaching, preaching comes from sending and that's all there is to it. We participate in advancing the gospel by sending it forward by preaching it and then God supplies the hearing ears that lead to belief and to salvation, so all of it is for the glory of God. And I can honestly say we do the very first two parts well, I mean, we tell people that we're loved, we touch them with the love of Christ, we encourage one another to share the good news of the love of Christ on a personal level by the way we love one another and we communicate like Christ did to Daniel through



physical touch. We are good at giving a tangible measure of the love of Christ but we can do better still. There are plenty of opportunities out there for every single one of us to flesh out in deed the encouragement that we give in word. But what I really hope and pray for us is a renewed sense of urgency of the third part. That's the *"but I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth"* part. We desperately need to grow our ability, our desire, our encouragement and our courage to trust that God is going to use us in sharing the most important message we could ever share. And that's the simple gospel that we are entrusted with. And now, now in this month more than any other time during the year, now is the season where the defenses are down. Now is the season where we have opportunity to share that gospel. So I would like to conclude this morning with a corporate prayer for each and every one of us as we go out into our families, as we go out into our communities, as we rub shoulders with people who are going to hell without this gospel, that we would have the courage and the wisdom to just speak when God gives us opportunity. So let's pray.

*Father, I just, I lift up each and every one in this church and I thank you for the privilege that we have. We are the continuation of what it is that you gave to Daniel. You told Daniel that we -- he was beloved. You tell us in your word that we are beloved. You touch Daniel physically. We can touch this community physically.*

*And you taught Daniel what he needed to know, and we can teach this community what they need to know but we need your help. We need your grace, we need your power, we need your Holy Spirit to be able to just have the courage to speak. Father, give each and every one of us the opportunity as we interact with our family, with our friends with our community, give each of us the opportunity and the wisdom and the desire to share the good news, give us those opportunities. We desperately want to share that news. Give us the courage that needs to accompany it as well I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*