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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

January 31, 2016

Daniel's Crisis Management

Daniel 2:1-19

Prayer: *Father, we just again thank you that you are our marvelous, marvelous father, that you love us, that you cared for us so much that you sent your son to die for us, that you care for us even now and that you are continuing to instruct us and guide us, that you've given us this amazing book that contains your wisdom. And Lord, we just want to pray again as we are opening up this book that we would have your Holy Spirit who makes the words come alive. Give us the ability by your Spirit's power to understand what we're looking at this morning, what we're hearing and to not only just understand it but again, to make it a permanent part of our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we're at this part of our exploration of the book of Daniel when we're encountering Daniel and his companions who have more or less just graduated from the Ivy League of Babylon. And they have excelled way beyond Nebuchadnezzar's wildest dreams, and as outsiders they've still managed to wildly outperform the other Babylonians. Well, the reason why they succeeded is also the

reason why they were captured. God's sovereign will was empowering their paths. *Daniel 1:17* says this: *God gave these four young men knowledge and understanding in every kind of literature and wisdom. Daniel also understood visions and dreams of every kind. In every matter of wisdom and understanding that the king consulted them about, he found them ten times better than all the diviner-priests and mediums in his entire kingdom.*

Never let it be said that God cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Jerusalem had no doubt been invaded and yes, there had been a crushing blow to the idea that having God on their side would somehow protect the Jews even though they had rejected his ways. Daniel and his companions had not, and in spite of the catastrophic losses that Jerusalem had suffered, Daniel along with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego is now riding the cusp of success. Now it was time for the first shoe to drop. This is *Daniel 2*. It says this: *In the second year of the reign Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. And the king said to them, "I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream."* Well, the king couldn't sleep not so much so because he had dreams, I mean, everyone has dreams, he

couldn't sleep because his spirit was troubled, and his spirit was troubled because God had plans to speak not only to Nebuchadnezzar but to you and to me through Daniel. Verse 4 says: *Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation."* The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, *"The word from me is firm: If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation."*

Now you can say an awful lot of things about Nebuchadnezzar, but one thing that you could say is that he was not a fool. Anyone can give an interpretation of a dream but only someone with access to the inside of a person's thinking can explain what the dream itself was. I mean it's what separates the men from the boys and in this case the Chaldeans are obviously boys. They're boys who are in an enormous amount of trouble. Again: *"If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins."* Nebuchadnezzar was somebody who plays for keeps. Verse 7, it says: *They answered a second time and said, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its interpretation."* Well, there must be a

thousand different ways that you can spin and interpret a dream. There's no spin whatsoever though in describing the dream. The Chaldeans knew they were in a desperate situation. In verse 8, it says: *The king answered and said, "I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time, because you see that the word from me is firm -- if you do not make the dream known to me, there is but one sentence for you. You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation."*

So Nebuchadnezzar is basically saying out loud what his paranoia had probably been witnessing to him for quite some time and that is that his wise men and his soothsayers were nothing but frauds incapable of any real insight but quite capable of pretending that they were. I mean the Chaldeans, they did what anybody else would do when they are backed up against a wall. This is verse 10, it says: *The Chaldeans answered the king and said, "There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."* You know, desperate people say desperate things, and what the Chaldeans are basically saying is, "Hey, this is not our fault. It's not our fault there, king, it's yours. Your expectations are

way too high for what we can do." Verse 12 says: *Because of this the king was very angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed.*

Consider Daniel and consider him and his companions' plight. First of all, they're kidnapped, they're imported, transported to Babylon, they stand up for God by refusing the king's food and God blesses them by giving them health in substance and in appearance. And along with that health he gives them this unique ability to understand the nature and the ways of the Chaldeans. Remember back in chapter 1 it says God gave these four young men knowledge and understanding in every kind of literature and wisdom. Daniel also understood visions and dreams of every kind. Unfortunately that skill set is not about to help them. Neither is the fact that they weren't even in the king's court. I mean, Daniel and his companions were nowhere near king Nebuchadnezzar when this confrontation with the Chaldeans took place, yet they get convicted along with them. I mean, they're only guilty of being the very thing that Nebuchadnezzar had trained them to be for the last three years. It's one of these cases of guilt by association. Daniel and his companions didn't even subscribe to the fraudulent nonsense the Chaldeans paraded as truth, but when their fraudulent practices are exposed, they're all simultaneously painted with the same broad brush. Verse 13: *So the decree went out, and the wise men were*

about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them. Even though Daniel and his companions had nothing whatsoever to do with the Chaldeans and their interactions with Nebuchadnezzar, they are considered to be just as guilty as the worst of them.

Well, you know, it's not the first time and I guarantee you it will not be the last that guilt by association is the lot of God's people. I mean, have you ever as a Christian been painted with that same type of broad brush? Have you ever been declared guilty by association? I mean, does that even sound vaguely familiar? You know, you may have heard it many, many different ways, it's kind of one of these kind of things, so you're a Christian, eh? How about those crusades where you raped and pillaged all across Europe under the guise of the cross, or how about the Salem witch trials where you murdered innocent women, or how about slavery in the deep south which you promoted because your Bible claimed it was okay? If it's not a historical reference, it may be some personal point of reference where you find yourself getting kind of swept up like Daniel in the collective guilt of a culture that doesn't even realize that it's now at war with Christianity. Oh, so you're a Christian? You people say that women need to be silent, barefoot, and pregnant. You know, you Christians like to blow up abortion clinics and oppress gay people and you don't want poor people to

get welfare. I never knew I had those positions. I mean, I never knew that until people who were decidedly un-Christian and anti-Christian told me that's how Christians think. That's what Christians do. Really? I mean, to me the first thing I think we need to do is admit the obvious. There are people who name the name of Christ and do awful things in that name. I spoke only a couple of weeks ago about a man who murdered unarmed people in a Planned Parenthood clinic supposedly in the name of Christ. There are people who are very happy to use the banner of Christianity to say and do things that the Bible would never support in a million years. In God speaks to that at some point in *Romans 2:24*, he says: *For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."*

But over against that, fueled by an extraordinarily hostile press is the desire to paint all Christians with the same kind of broad brush that Daniel was painted with. It all makes perfect sense if you understand the big picture here. The big picture goes back to the notion once again, we are at war. There's a war going on between two great kingdoms. And Jesus was crystal clear in describing Satan as the one who runs this kingdom, the one who is the god of this world. As he approached the cross, Jesus became more and more specific about who it was he was doing battle with. In *John 12:31* he says: *"Now is the judgment of this world; now*

will the ruler of this world be cast out." In John 14 he says: "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me." And then in John 16, he says: "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is to your advantage I go away, because the ruler of this world is judged." Jesus is very comfortable with the idea that Satan is the ruler of this world. Now if you were to stop the average person on the street and try to tell him that this world all around you, this wonderful world that they see, it's really actually run and controlled by Satan, they're likely to think that you're some kind of a nut. That's because the ruler of this world has successfully created the mythology that he's this cartoon character dressed up in red with a pointed tail and horns. I mean, no doubt he loves that kind of a characterization. And if you're not convinced that he's some cartoon character, he's happy to have you think he's something like out of the *Exorcist* or all of the dozens of movies that got spawned from that that present him as some otherworldly alien evil distinctly recognizable as such. I'm sure nothing pleases him more than to be characterized that way because it allows him to hide in plain sight. I mean, what he's after is the good people. What he's after is the noble people, the ones who are convinced that their goodness is good enough. These are people that Jesus literally described as sons of the devil. This is what he said in *John 8:44*, he said: "You are of your father the devil, and you

want to carry out your father's desires."

Now according to Jesus, the devil's own flesh and blood, they're not cartoon characters and they're not some kind of alien creatures. They are instead just good, solid religious folk who hold up the moral fiber of contemporary Jerusalem. That's the kind of disguise the enemy loves to wear. And so it follows that he hates everything authentic about those who profess Christ and his gospel. The days of our romantic attachment to a pseudo Christian culture are pretty much over, and as Russell Moore points out, he says, good riddance. I mean today we are living in a culture in which -- and I like this -- everybody's cards are on the table. We live in a world that is at war. Jesus came to this planet to undertake a ransom and rescue mission that would cost him his own life, and when he left his world he bequeathed that mission to us. Part of undertaking that mission is understanding who the enemy is and who he is not. My unbelieving friend or neighbor or relative or co-worker is not the enemy. The folks all around us are not the enemy; they are our mission field. The enemy is the enemy. The one who Jesus identified as the ruler of this world is the enemy. That's the one who's working 24/7 to sow hatred and discord, murder and lies particularly against the kingdom of God. But he's an enemy who's incredibly skilled at hiding his intentions and his actions. *And no wonder! -- 2 Corinthians 11 says -- for Satan*

disguises himself as an angel of light. And because he's so good at hiding and disguise, the rest of the world doesn't even realize that it's been conscripted and is working for him. They don't realize that because they're blind. Again, 2 Corinthians 4:3 says: But if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the God of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

You see, we've been sent by Jesus Christ into a world that neither comprehends nor understands the beauty of the gospel, and if we ever want to be successful at communicating that gospel, we have to understand the world that it's being spoken into. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan have been locked in a battle since the Garden of Eden. And it's a battle that's going to continue up until the last days at which point Satan will get his just desserts. But until then there are going to be many, many times where from a human perspective things are going to look awfully grim. Just remember the church itself was born three days after God was nailed to a cross. I mean, it was the greatest victory there ever was but the people who were closest to it didn't see it as such. I pointed out many, many times that God is quite content to win by losing, and sometimes that losing is local and sometimes it's culture wide. We use this term "zeitgeist" to describe

literally what is the spirit of the age. In essence, it is a reflection of how God allows the battle between good and evil or light and darkness to wax and wane according to how he sees fit. You know, we've had this back and forth for centuries. We've had the Renaissance and the dark ages. We've had the great awakening and Nazi Germany. You know, the zeitgeist is constantly changing. And there are certainly times when it seems like the kingdom of God is in the ascendancy and there are times when it appears to be in decline. There are times when I can distinctly remember when we appeared to be in a culture that enjoyed a broad Christian consensus like the post-war culture in the 50's and 60's, and times when the culture has turned hostile. I mean, I should know, I'm a child of the 60's. I graduated high school in 1967. And every since then there's been wars, there's been rumors of wars, there's been protests and upheaval and in the last fifty years we have gradually seen the Christian cultural consensus just begin to evaporate. I mean, you'd have to be blind not to see that that consensus has completely eroded at this point and Christians are more and more likely to feel like they're under attack. And the way I've heard it described in the past is that the gospel represents this great, great light of the world and you picture it as a raging campfire and you picture it raging and it's blazing, it's just going out, pushing the light out in all different directions illuminating everything everywhere. And as the light of

that gospel begins to diminish ever so faintly, you begin to see around the periphery of the camp these very faint at first glowing pairs of red eyes, and they start to grow ever so bolder. And you start to see one there, and then you see one there, and then you see one there, and then you see one there. And you realize that these are the enemies of the gospel and they're not so much a people as an opportunistic spiritual presence. Opportunistic bacteria, they're all over us. And what they are, they are creatures that sit and wait for the right opportunity, the right confluence of circumstance and then they pounce. Well, there are opportunistic spiritual entities. Those are the red eyes. And what they need is an absence of light, a dimming of its presence and a growing darkness. And God identifies what that consists of in *Galatians 5:19*, he says this: *Now the works of the flesh are obvious: Sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I tell you about these things in advance -- as I told you before -- that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.* Those are the red eyes. Those are the red eyes that are out on the periphery and they have been held in check by the light of the gospel. And as the gospel grows dimmer and dimmer in its presentation, guess what? Those red eyes get more and more numerous and more and more bold. It's not that

they're new, I mean, they've always been here, they've just been pushed back by the light. God said in *John 3:19*: "*This, then, is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who practices wicked things hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed.*"

Sometimes God allows us to see just what's going to happen when the darkness gains almost complete control and we see that happening right now in the Middle East -- at least in parts of the Middle East. And those parts you see the red eyes are in the driving seat and wherever ISIS shows up, make no mistake about it, ISIS is simply the unvarnished will of the enemy. It's the enemy completely exposed. Most of the time we see Satan in his various disguises, but when we read about or see what ISIS does particularly to Christians, we see exactly what the enemy's intent is for all of us. I mean, the disguise is removed. The murderous intent is revealed. And that's precisely what Daniel experienced in Babylon. For three years now he's been attending these elite universities in Babylon where he, along with his companions, have been wowing their professors. Daniel staked out his claim to still hold on to his identity in Jerusalem by refusing to eat the king's food and yet he's still sleeker and fatter than any of his other fellow Babylonian students and he's also much, much wiser. Again,

Daniel 1:20: In every matter of wisdom and understanding that the king consulted about them, he found them ten times better than all the diviner-priests and mediums in his entire kingdom. Now all of that's gone. Now in a fit of pique all of Daniel's wisdom and that wisdom that his companions had, it all means nothing. The disguise has come off and in its place is a murderous rage that wants them all dead. You know, they had nothing whatsoever to do with the fiasco the Chaldeans were embroiled in with the king, but it made no difference at all. They were all painted with the exact same broad brush.

Daniel 2:13 goes on to say: So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them. Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. He declared to Arioch, the king's captain, "Why is the decree of the king so urgent?" Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel. And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king. Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then the mystery was

revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

Well, the very first thing we need to learn from what happened to Daniel is a principle that applies not just to him but to us as well, and this is the principle: God often times sends opportunity to us dressed up as crisis. You see, to Daniel and his companion -- companions, this was clearly no doubt a crisis. Well, to God who knows the end from the beginning, this was an opportunity. And when you look back at the lives of the great figures in scripture, lives that God has laid out to instruct us in, you can see that same pattern repeating itself over and over again. Take a look at somebody like Joseph. Joseph goes from a kidnapping to a rape charge to imprisonment to a mega famine. Crisis to crisis to crisis to crisis, and each crisis is an opportunity for God's glory and for Joseph's personal growth. We look at Abraham or Isaac or Joseph or David and we look at all of the patriarchs' lives and we see they're all marked by crisis. Each one is a preparation for the next one. Well, Daniel, it turns out, was no exception, but guess what? Neither are we. I mean, I look at my 43 years as a Christian and I see the exact same pattern. I mean, we see crisis; God sees opportunity. This goes all the way up to and including the opportunities that people have to glorify God by even what is arguably their greatest crisis and

that is their deaths. I mean, the thief on the cross received an opportunity to glorify God that way and he took it. And just last week we've been looking at Matthew Ayanga, the fellow who watched the twenty other Coptic Christians go to their deaths executed by ISIS for their faith, and he said, "Their God is my God." He took that opportunity too. It was a crisis that became an opportunity. Consider the first martyr Stephen. He's facing the very same crisis that ended in his death. God says crisis to you, opportunity for all. And God is pointing out that all of heaven was waiting for Stephen while he was in the middle of this crisis and that Jesus himself stood up to receive him. This is Acts 7:54, it says: *When they heard these things, they were enraged in their hearts and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven, he saw God's glory, with Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" Then they screamed at the top of their voices, covering their ears, and together rushed against him. They threw him out of the city and began to stone him.* Crisis or opportunity? It all depends on what you're looking at.

God is in the process of training every one of us. He is taking each of us and he's shaping and molding us into the very image of his son. And sometimes in your life and mine, at some point that

will include a crisis or two or three. I mean usually it's not unto death but sometimes it is. I know in my life I can literally think of at least a half a dozen or so times I've been literally driven to my knees to cry out to God, and every one of those times was not when things were going great. It was always when there was some kind of a crisis. And looking back, I realized that I saw them as crisis, God saw them as opportunities, opportunities to demonstrate his wisdom in a practical way, his willingness to hear my plea, and his worthiness as a God who answers prayer. You know, we say all things work together for good but I don't think we realize that God takes that far more seriously than we think. He means all things. And here's the amazing thing to consider. God has already laid out your crisis and mine. He's got them all set. They're all laid out for us ahead of time. He doesn't call it crisis; he calls it good works. This is *Ephesians 2:10*, he says: *For we are His creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them.* Jesus's greatest work was a crisis that ended in his death. Make no mistake about it, Daniel right now is facing imminent death as well. And so he decides in the middle of this crisis/opportunity to do three things that are of great value for us to learn because we're all going to have those opportunities that God has prepared in advance for us to walk in.

The first thing that Daniel did was he used the wisdom that God gave him to negotiate with his potential killer. Again, back to *Daniel 2:13*, it says: *So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them. Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. He declared to Arioch, the king's captain, "Why is the decree of the king so urgent?" Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel.* Well, there you have it, Daniel replies with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. Now, we don't know what Daniel's conversation was all about and we don't know whether he appealed to Arioch's fear of getting killed himself or maybe Arioch's ego or perhaps even their friendship, they may have had one, I don't know. We don't know. But we do know that Daniel did use prudence and discretion, wisdom and discretion and that the wisdom that he used is not something that's limited to the wise alone. You know, one of the greatest gifts God has given to every single one of us is an unlimited supply of the wisdom we need to walk through any crisis we will ever face. *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him* is without a doubt the one verse in scripture that I have repeated far more than any other verse in the entire Bible. I've said it over and over and

over again to myself, I've prayed it to myself, I've absolutely desperately needed that promise to be true and it's been over and over and over again proven. I mean, it's the only verse in which God promises to any believer who asks the supernatural ability to skillfully walk through whatever circumstance you find yourself in, including a crisis. The conditions for gaining God's wisdom are ridiculously simple. Number one, you have to need wisdom; number two, you have to know that you don't have it; number three, you have to believe he's going to give it to you. How hard is that? You have to trust that he's going to be truthful when he says I'll give it to you. You know, God makes his promise to us knowing that most of us, we didn't have much wisdom to start out with. He's not looking to make wise people wiser. He's looking to make people who have no wisdom wise. *1 Corinthians 1:26 says: For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.* See, what God is saying to us, he's saying wisdom, particularly in dealing with a crisis, is yours for the asking. That's all you have to do is ask and I'll give it. That's what God is saying.

Secondly, Daniel did precisely what wisdom would dictate you do when you're in a crisis. He sought out the fellowship of his companions and together they sought God in prayer. Verse 17: *Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah,*

Michael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Understand, Daniel had no illusions about what he was asking of God. There's nothing generic about this request, it's not oh, God, help everyone everywhere, I hope all things work out for the best. That's not what he's saying. Daniel has a desperate need to know something very specific. I need to know what's going on inside Nebuchadnezzar's head when he had that dream. That's what he needs to know. And without those specific pieces of information, there's no hope whatsoever for Daniel going forward. So no doubt, Daniel and his companions sought God in prayer and they prayed, however, earnestly and joyfully. And I use that term "joyfully" advisedly because what I mean by the term "joyfully" is being very specific about what it is you need while still giving all of the circumstance over to God's superior wisdom. I don't know about you but when I'm in a crisis, my first thought in prayer when asking for wisdom is for the specifics that the crisis is directed to. Lord, would you please heal, would you please change this person's attitude or mind, or direction? The prayer that God is truly seeking from all of us is one that makes our requests known to God but doesn't presume God has to answer my prayer my way. I mean, earnest and joyful prayer just doesn't presume to have the answers. It gives God the sovereign right to have the

final say.

We see a perfect example of that kind of prayer in the book of Acts. This is a terrible time for the church, where we're going to look at in the book of Acts, Herod had just realized that he could curry favor with the Jews by killing Christians, and so he launches a violent attack on this new church and the church instead responds to this crisis just like Daniel did, with wisdom and fellowship and earnest and joyful prayer. This is Acts 12:1, it says: *About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison.*

Now we know that the prayer that the church prayed was not presumptuous because we will see that the result of that prayer was a complete shock to the prayers. They were astounded by the way

that God answered that prayer. They had not set up an agenda, they had not determined that this way or that way was the way God had to answer their prayer, they simply earnestly prayed. And we know that their prayer was not from doubt and that it was not from despair because the scripture describes it as earnest prayer and answered prayer and James has already told us that prayer prayed in doubt will not be answered. He says in *James 1:6*: *The one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.* So their prayer like Daniel's and his companions', it didn't come from doubt, it didn't come from despair, and it certainly didn't come from presumption. In fact it came from exactly how James says it should come, from seeing crisis as an opportunity, from a certain knowledge that God is good and even though things are looking incredibly grim and Peter is about to be executed, we won't presume, we won't doubt, we won't despair, we're just going to earnestly and joyfully pray because our God is still in charge. And we call that attitude joy. Well, here's how God answered that prayer. This is *Acts 12:6*. It says: *Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And*

the chains fell off his hands.

So here we see Peter, he's bound between two soldiers, he's awaiting his execution and he's sleeping like a baby, and three things happen all at once, light floods into the cell, Peter gets struck by an angel, and the chains on his hands simply fall off. Verse 8 says: *And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals."* And he did so. You get the impression here that Peter is still in a daze and what I find so amazing and so touching is the angel himself has to slow down and basically tell Peter how to get dressed. He says: *"Dress yourself and put on your sandals."* Peter's apparently still in a fog because he needs even further basic instruction. And it goes on to say and he said to him, *"Wrap your cloak around you and follow me."* And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real but thought he was seeing a vision. Of course that explains it, Peter thinks, well, this must be a dream, this can't be real. This must be a vision. Verse 10 says: *When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him.* Well, the angel, having completed his task, he's done, he just disappears and Peter comes out of his fog. In Acts 12:11, it says: *When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that*

the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." I can tell you what the church was expecting, they were expecting an execution. They got instead a divine display of supernatural power, a proof that God was a good God and that he was still in charge. A crisis had become an opportunity. And what follows is almost comical. It proves that the prayers themselves had no agenda, they didn't know what God was going to do. It says Peter goes to Mary's house where the saints had gathered to pray and he knocks on the door and Rhoda the servant girl sees him and she just totally flips out. She turns around, she leaves him outside and she goes running back to tell everybody there's this dead man walking is now standing outside the door. Acts 12:15 says: They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place. What Peter was doing was he was turning over the running of the new church from himself to James, the same James who gave us the scripture about wisdom. I mean no one understood better than James that doubt is a no man's land that you find somewhere between unbelief and belief and that

when it comes to praying through a crisis, there was in fact a promised land, and that promised land lay somewhere between presumption and despair, it's a place of absolute confidence instead of presumption, a place of absolute hope instead of despair, a place where doubt was foreign because regardless of how difficult or impossible things seemed to be, there was absolute certainty not of outcome and not of result, but of one simple joyful fact that rendered doubt powerless, and that fact is God is a good God, he knows what he's doing, he's still in charge no matter what happens.

In Daniel's case we'll see later on that earnest prayer had rendered Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, so certain, so absolutely convinced of God's goodness and power that when threatened themselves with death in a fiery furnace because they refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image, their basic attitude was, hey, whatever. I mean *Daniel 3*, it says this: "*O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.*" And I love these three words. "*But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.*" O king, our God can miraculously save us. Or not. That's the attitude. And what they're saying, either way, as they say,

it's all good. I mean, that attitude of trust is going to take you through any crisis you will ever find yourself in.

Daniel had applied Godly wisdom, prudence and discretion in convincing Nebuchadnezzar's agent not to take his life and the life of his companions. Secondly, he sought out the fellowship of his companions and they earnestly, joyfully sought God in prayer; and thirdly, Daniel went back to God in a spirit of thanksgiving.

Verse 19: *Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.* It's often times amazing to me how quickly I move on from God's answered prayer in my life, forgetting to stop long enough to even say to God, "Thank you." Janice and I were praying the other day and I was realizing that I'd been asking God to increase something that had already been a huge answer to prayer in the first place and I had just kind of moved on to the next phase of what I wanted now for that particular situation. I hardly had even stopped for a moment to say, oh, wait a minute, I don't think I've even thanked you for that circumstance in the first place. And when God answers your prayers, stop, stop for a moment and marinate in thankfulness for those answered prayers. In fact the wisest thing to do is to write them down. It will do you much good and it will honor the God who answers prayer. You see, Daniel found himself in the middle of a crisis. It was one of many that we will encounter in

the book of Daniel. And you and I are also going to encounter a crisis or two in our lives or three or four or a dozen or more. Daniel's crisis drove him to practice wisdom, fellowship, prayer, and thankfulness and he was able to glorify God through it. Our crisis may not be a matter of life and death like his was or maybe it just might. I mean, crisis isn't foreign to God. God became one of us and then offered up his life as full payment for our sins and because of his love for you and me, his crisis ended in death. It was also the opportunity for us to have eternal life. Crisis and opportunity, they're one in the same thing. It is the same Jesus who invites us to see our crisis as opportunity. They're all part of the good works that God has prepared in advance for us to walk in, and when we see them for what they really are, we will by his grace and by his wisdom use them to glorify God. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for Daniel, I thank you for the crises that we see him walking through in his life. I thank you for the response that we see to that crisis. I thank you for the wisdom and the fellowship and the prayer and the thankfulness that we see that evolved out of this crisis, and I think in my own life the time when -- times when wisdom and prayer and fellowship and thankfulness became absolutely crucial and critical to me was always in a time of crisis. Lord, help us by your grace, by your power, by your wisdom to see each of the crises that we are in as

opportunity. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.