

**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

**Daniel 10 (The promise of Jesus)**

**Talk by Andrew Griffiths, Prayers by Julian Providence**

Good morning.

My name is Andrew and thanks for downloading the talk for St John's church for Sunday 14 March 2021. I will be reading from Daniel 10, giving a short talk and then Julian will be leading our prayers, before we end.

Today is Mothers' Day – when we have a great tradition of honouring and thanking our mothers. Did you know, you probably did, that it originally had nothing to do with actual mothers? Instead, it was the Sunday when you traditionally went back to the church in which you were baptised – or your 'mother church'. However, as that practice has died out, the new one has taken its name and its place – for the better, I think.

Mothers' Day is a day to thank your mums, but it can be a bit bitter sweet – a lot of us, me included, have lost their mums, and some people did not have a happy childhood. But the wonder of the gospel is that whatever our experience, good or bad (and I hope yours was good) we have been adopted into God's family through Christ's love for us. Love, surely the defining characteristic associated with Mothers' Day, finds its fullest and truest expression in the love of Christ on the cross – and we can celebrate that together.

But I also want to reflect on something else related to Mothers' Day, and that is that we speak about honouring mothers today, but that is empty if it is not accompanied by action. We are reading through the book of Daniel, and Daniel is about two main things – the faithfulness of God and how we should be faithful in return.

And in James 1:22-24, we read this:

*<sup>22</sup> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup> Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.*

As Christians we are called to live out what we say we believe – otherwise we are the fools that James described here. And we live in a world where we pay respect to women, but are content to live in a society where violence against women is tolerated and accepted. There was the terribly sad news of Sarah Everard, kidnapped and killed just up the road from here in Clapham. And following that, I've seen and heard so many stories of women I know who have been subject to abuse walking or running in the street. We live in a world where some women are subjected to Female Genital Cutting, or are forced to marry, sometimes even before they are adults. Did you know that in the UK, prosecutions and convictions for rape have more than halved in three years while rapes have risen?

And we also have inequality, like the gender pay gap, which is just under 16%. A big reason for that is that women are financially punished for precisely what we are celebrating today – for becoming mothers.

If Daniel is about faithfulness in action, not just in word, then alongside celebrating Mothers' Day we should be clear that the church that stands against violence against women and misogyny and that we will do what we can to promote gender equality.

And let's pray alongside the Archbishop of Canterbury for the family and friends of Sarah Everard. Lord have mercy. Let us cry out to God in anger and lament, and let us pray and work relentlessly for a society where women feel safe.

### **Daniel's Vision of a Man**

**10** In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war.<sup>[a]</sup> The understanding of the message came to him in a vision.

<sup>2</sup> At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. <sup>3</sup> I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.

<sup>4</sup> On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, <sup>5</sup> I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. <sup>6</sup> His body was like topaz, 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.

<sup>7</sup> I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. <sup>8</sup> So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. <sup>9</sup> Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.

<sup>10</sup> A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. <sup>11</sup> He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.

<sup>12</sup> Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. <sup>13</sup> But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. <sup>14</sup> Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come."

<sup>15</sup> While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless. <sup>16</sup> Then one who looked like a man<sup>[b]</sup> touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. I said to the one standing before me, "I am overcome with

anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I feel very weak. <sup>17</sup> How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe.”

<sup>18</sup> Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. <sup>19</sup> “Do not be afraid, you who are highly esteemed,” he said. “Peace! Be strong now; be strong.”

When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, “Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength.”

<sup>20</sup> So he said, “Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; <sup>21</sup> but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince.

## Talk

Daniel, we’ve been looking through it in quite a bit of detail. And today, I’ve saved you a bit, because I’ve cut 35 verses from the rota’d reading. And Daniel is the sort of book which makes one important point repeatedly – that God has a plan and is ultimately in control. Through the rise and falls of empires, God is faithful, and we should be faithful in return. This morning, we read from Daniel 10 – and the rota’d sections of Daniel 11 – verses 1-35 include more detail of how empires rise and fall, but God’s people and message will prevail. At times, as we continue to get through this covid time, it can feel endless – that is why the message of Daniel is not just for the Israelites in ancient Babylon, but also for now.

But I feel like this sermon has been preached a few times already in this series. So, I want instead to focus on a couple of really important, but smaller details, that we find in today’s passage. The first is the promise and prophecy of Jesus that Daniel points to. Who is the character that Daniel sees, as he stands and looks out over the river Tigris? Well, Jesus made a remarkable claim – that it was him who Daniel refers to here, and had previously referred to in Daniel 7, where in verses 13 and 14 it states:

*In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

Jesus used the term ‘son of man’ to describe himself numerous times – far too many to list here. For example, in Mark 10: 45 he said: ‘*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*’ Or Matthew 25:31, where he said ‘*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.*’ Or John 9: 35-37: ‘<sup>35</sup> *Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”* <sup>36</sup> *“Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”* <sup>37</sup> *Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact,*

*he is the one speaking with you.*" In Daniel 10:16 and 18, we read of 'one who looked like a man', another way of saying the same thing.

Jesus, by using the term 'son of man' was claiming that he was the one referred to in Daniel 7 – that he would be given all authority, glory and power and his kingdom will never end – but he is also claiming a pre-history, from Daniel 10, that it was he who promised God's kingdom. Daniel is full of fantastical visions of beasts and powers and ancient kingdoms – but over all, with all the sovereign power, glory and authority, is God's Son, Jesus Christ. As Martin Luther, the great theologian said, 'all the Scriptures show us Christ' – and Daniel 10 does just that.

The second detail I want to point to is also from verse 16: *Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak.* There are two reasons for opening your mouth – to eat and to speak. And God's power here is not used to empower eating, no falafel wrap for Daniel – as I assume they would have eaten, even then, in ancient Babylon. Rather, God empowers Daniel to open his mouth to speak and share God's truth.

This is a strong biblical tradition – where God's power opens the lips, that is allows a person to speak. It not only allows speech, but empowers it – we see the same in Isaiah 6:7, where one of the angels surrounding God brings a coal from God's altar to Isaiah's lips, with the words '*See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.*' This was the calling of Isaiah to speak God's truth. Or David, in Psalm 51:15 asking, '*O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise.*' And the same in Daniel 10.

Because God speaks to us, but that is not the end of His relationship with us. He also calls us to speak His truth into the world. Daniel was just a man, but he attested to the mighty work of God; he spoke of the wonders of God's power. Daniel was a prophet in Israel's darkest hour – when the kingdom had been utterly destroyed and the people removed from the land God had promised them and the temple where He was present among them.

In this difficult time, God called Daniel to share the visions of God's ultimate and awesome power. And as we saw earlier, this is the ultimate prophesy of Christ and His unending kingdom. So, as the Son of Man we read about in Daniel 10 reached out, touched Daniel's lips and opened his mouth to sharing God's truth. And that is the same for us – we are called to open our lips to sharing God's truth.

It might not be as dramatic as it was for Daniel, with, as it says in verses 5 and 6 a '*man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body like topaz, 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.*' But it is just as meaningful.

Romans 10:8-9 say '*But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*' And then in verses 14-15: *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how*

*can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*

We are called to share the good news of Christ, just as Daniel had his mouth opened in Daniel 10. It is not our message we tell, and it is not on our own – rather it is the good news, the gospel, of Christ that we tell with the help of the Holy Spirit. As Romans 1:16 says '*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*'

Daniel 10 and 11 are all about God's power being shown, being revealed, in the darkest time. And that is the message of the gospel – that in the darkest, most dreadful and terrible death, the death of Jesus on the cross, the power, love and hope of God are fully revealed. Because, as we will celebrate at Easter, Christ is risen. And as we say every time we celebrate communion – Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again.

Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for your amazing power, shown again and again in Daniel.

We thank you most of all that your amazing power was shown fully in the life, death and resurrection of your Son, our saviour, Jesus Christ.

We pray that we will forever live, as Daniel did, with the knowledge that you have touched our lips to speak the truth of the gospel.

We pray for confidence in sharing the truth with others, and that you will pour out your Holy Spirit on us.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen

And now Julian will lead us in our prayers.

### **Intercessions**

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus this mothering Sunday we thank you for your faithful love for us. You say in your word that you will not forget us and you will remember us as a mother has regard for her child (Isaiah 49:15).

We remember today how you have had compassion on all of us by wiping away our sins at the cross and raising us to new life with you. Even when we were dead in our sin you did not abandon us but ran to meet us as your children.

Thank you for our experience of good motherhood - for a happy and secure home to grow up in, for a mother who knew and understood us, who sacrificed for us and protected us. Thank you for all women who have been as mothers in our lives, sharing their love and wisdom and bringing us safely into adulthood. Thank you for the positive influence those mothers have brought into our lives and thank you that for some of us their faithful love will have brought us to know you for ourselves.

We pray for mothers at St John's, that you would bless them with the ability to enjoy motherhood. Help them to keep close and trusting relationships with their children. Give them wisdom and patience and may your light shine through them that their children would see and know you.

We pray for those of us who have had difficult relationships with our mothers. For those of us who may have experienced conflict, loss of relationship or abandonment. Lord you also know motherhood cannot be perfect. You promise in your word that:

*"Though my mother and father forsake me The Lord will receive me". (Psalm 27:10).*

Thank you that no matter what our experience of motherhood or parenthood is, your love for us remains deep and constant and unchanging and we know that you will always be faithful in your promise never to leave us or forsake us.

Come by your Holy Spirit and help us to heal the hurts of where our relationship may have been difficult or absent with our mothers. Help us to have compassion as you had compassion on us, to forgive the wrongs done to us and understand the struggles they may have had. We pray for our mothers who have not yet come to know you that they would come to experience for themselves your love and forgiveness and healing.

We pray for Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a mother separated for 5 years from her daughter and husband while imprisoned in Iran. She faces new charges and a possibly a new sentence today. Lord again we pray will you release her. We remember others imprisoned in Iran like Nazanin and mothers around the world surviving under oppressive regimes because they've stood for you or for freedom from oppression. Others enduring hardships as refugees or being treated as unworthy of freedom and dignity. Lord God who hears the cry of the oppressed, please bring relief to the suffering of people where governments abuse their power or for those caught in war zones. Lord we remember so many places of oppression and conflict around the world where people are known to you, not as nations but as individuals and families. We thank you that you know them and that you hear us when we pray for them. We pray that you would give power and authority to governments who speak out for righteousness and justice to end oppression.

We pray especially for your suffering church, that you would strengthen and comfort your people, even in the midst of persecution and that you would fulfill your promise that your church would stand against the gates of hell to the glory of your name.

We pray for our own church remembering all those in need. We pray particularly for Will this time. Please Lord we pray that you would reverse the damage to his brain. We thank you so much for the medical team looking after him. We ask that you would give them insight and skill in treating him. We pray that you would be near to Kath and Sam. We pray for others - for Audrey's heart, Val's mobility, Karim's father to continue to get stronger, for Alison's sister and sister-in-law and all of us at St John's in need, who are known to you.

Please take a moment to remember somebody before the Lord or pray for a need you have.....

Please Lord watch over us, especially as these difficult times of separation continue. Holy Spirit will you keep bringing to mind those who need our prayer and support and help us to respond in the best way we can. Holy Spirit keep the bond of unity with the St John's family.

And as we prepare to join with Holy Trinity to become one greater family of Christ, Holy Spirit would you be especially present with both our churches. Please equip us with wisdom and the ability to anticipate obstacles. Help us to be open to your leading and sensitive to both our congregations needs as we merge. We pray this especially for both PCCs and working groups. We pray for our interview panel that you would give them a unity of purpose and supernatural ability to sense the person you are sending to lead us as they start interviews in a couple of weeks. Help us also to have the patience and trust to wait for you if the right candidate is not ready.

We pray for CAP and for the requests in the March prayer letter. Faithful God, thank you for answered prayer that they have had volunteers come forward to support the work. We pray Lord that you would continue to send them more. Please continue to sustain Lin, Rachel and Gareth.

We remember Cherry and pray for Amaze Penge that you would sustain this lifeline for parents and children.

We pray for our nation that you would continue to help us push back the pandemic and lead our government and medical officer in being able to open our society and economy in as safe a way as possible. Lord, there is so much yet to do even as lockdown ends - job losses, loss of education and opportunity for young people, burgeoning mental health needs, huge backlogs of medical treatments. Please Lord Jesus in your mercy give us hope. Be with us as a nation leading us out of these difficult times. Lord we pray that you would use this time when people are questioning the meaning of life to draw people to you.

We pray for the royal family, that you would give wisdom to the Queen and the palace in knowing how to respond. We pray for grace and forgiveness and for healing of hurts and for past wrongs to be put right. We pray the evil one would not be able to exploit this situation to sow division and hatred.

We pray about the murder of Sarah Everard. We pray for her family and friends and the loss they will be experiencing. We pray that the culture and attitudes that promote hatred and violence toward women would be exposed for the shameful thing that it is and bring change. Thank you that in your family there is no male or female but we are one in Christ.

We pray our family prayer:

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours  
now and forever.  
Amen.**

Thank you for listening. God bless