

The Moment of Despair

While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master. – Luke 8:49

Up to this point in the narrative, there had been hope in Jairus' heart. As a ruler of the synagogue, he had risked much in merely coming to Jesus. He had likely bucked friends and colleagues, stepping out in a scant yet desperate faith that the itinerant Rabbi could heal his precious daughter. But that hope came crashing down in an enormous, awful blow with the messengers' words, "Thy daughter is dead." What torment must have flooded his heart. In a single moment, a cacophony of self-flagellating reprimands twisted the knife deeper. It is over. I was too late. If I had only come sooner. Perhaps the devilish whispers could be heard as well, "If He was Who He said He is, your daughter would not have died."

In that moment of despair, Jairus was faced with a decision. He could give up and go home – to grieve, to figure out how to go on. It probably seemed like the logical thing to do. But there was another choice – more difficult, and of much greater risk. He could keep believing, permitting the faith that drove him to seek out Christ to now cling tenaciously to Him. As he wrestled with his emotions and his will, he heard the Lord's still, small voice, "Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole." Jairus, choosing to shun the despair and embrace the Savior, chose wisely.

Our lives in a cursed world will present each of us with some (and perhaps, many) moments of despair – times when, no matter how much we want to believe, the only way to continue to do so is an act of the will. These will require us to muster everything within us to shun the taunting whispers of the enemy and listen for the voice of God. These are inflection points in our valleys of decision. If we are not careful, we can easily succumb to the pain, to the sorrow, to the temptation to doubt. But if we are wise, like Jairus, we will know that the next step is the most powerful one – the decision to believe despite how we feel, to trust despite how illogical it might seem, to cling to Christ and His Word even though it may have never been harder to do so.

This is God's way for those He loves. There will be moments of despair – but they are only moments, after all. The Lord of Life is greater than any flickering issue, no matter how impactful it seems. Let us remember that He delights to turn our mourning into dancing. Sorrow may endure for the night but take heart and believe – joy is sure to come in the morning when we choose to believe. – D. Murcek

Pertinacity

Genesis 32:26: And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

Jacob was spending a sleepless night contemplating the inevitable outcomes of the next day when he would be confronted by his vengeful brother. Esau had been storing up wrath to avenge the stolen birthright and to wrestle from his conniving brother the inheritance that had been deceptively denied him. Sixty-five years only intensified his desire for revenge as his murderous designs festered in his heart.

Jacob could only elude his adversary for so long. And so on this eve of destruction the Lord meets him at Mahanaim and engages with him in a divine wrestling match affording to him the comfort of certain success on the morrow and to us a sublime lesson on importunity in prayer.

We children of the king are as weak as Jacob and as he “not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed”. We are taught here to cling tenaciously to the author and finisher of our faith. When we have spent all our energies and ingenuities and find ourselves enervated to the point of exhaustion, there is nothing left in us but to cling to the power of our omnipotent God. The Lord delights in our resignation. For as surely as we will not let go of Him, so assuredly He will never let go of us.

*O love that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee.
I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine oceans depths its flow.
May richer fuller be.*

Let us then take solace in the illustrated truth. No matter the direness of your immediate struggle as Jacob did, so must we take hold of the arm of the Almighty and never let go until the blessing is secured.

Have a blessed day,

Pastor

Peaceful communion

I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.

Psalm 4:8

As David begins this psalm calling upon the Lord when he was in distress, he is able to end it with an attitude of peace and safety. After begging God for mercy and complaining about his enemies, he reminds himself that the Lord has set apart the godly for Himself. He knows that the Lord will take care of His own, who trust in Him. Such a relationship makes David to know that the Lord will hear his prayer. He then exhorts himself and his hearers to stand in awe, sin not, and “commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still” (v. 4). In such a time, he knew that to consider the magnitude of God’s grace and goodness toward those who trust Him would settle his heart and mind. He thus follows with the response to offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and to trust in the Lord. He understood the need for sacrifice under the old covenant to ensure his standing and uprightness with his God. His own works were insufficient for righteousness, and his sins needed to be cleansed. Having then trusted in the grace of God for these, he would trust in the Lord for his circumstances also. With this understanding, he could sleep in peace with God.

We hear many advertisements these days about remedies for getting a good night’s sleep. Such remedies may offer some temporal relief in certain circumstances of physical pain or distress, but none can match the spiritual remedy of peace with God. As those that abide in the new covenant, we have the promise, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). When we are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, we can put our trust in the Lord for all things. There will be circumstances that appear to be greater than we can bear, but there is nothing too hard for the Lord. Let us then, as David, commune with our own hearts, as we remind ourselves of the promises of God, and “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

The Faith of Moses

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter...

Hebrews 11:24

The Spirit's commentary in Hebrews 11 on the life of the Lawgiver illustrates a progression of faith we all ought to seek to emulate. Moses, like Elijah, was a man subject to like passions as we, yet God used him greatly in his generation. This was not because he was special or better or sinless. Indeed, a cursory reading of the account of Moses' life in the Old Testament portrays for us a man deeply flawed and often conflicted. But there is a journey to our faith – as theirs was to his – that takes years, and frequently decades, to grow and fashion and ultimately perfect it into what God intends for us. Let us briefly consider some of the Spirit's lessons on Moses' faith from His divine perspective...

Moses' faith started in the home (Heb. 11:23). Amram and Jochebed were wise parents, choosing to ignore the threat of the king and fear God instead. No earthly power or potentate could have their proper child. They hid him. They prayed for him. They likely rehearsed the promise of the covenant to him. And that influence stuck, likely haunting Moses for decades in the court of Pharaoh, working in tandem with the Spirit of God to call him out from Egypt as an inheritor of God's promises so sweetly sung to him upon his mother's knee from his earliest vague recollections.

Moses' faith formed his identity. Here was a man mighty in words and deeds, schooled in the elite colleges of Egypt. A formidable warrior and an influential statesman, the son of Pharaoh's daughter. All of this he surrendered. It was a façade, and he knew it. At his core, he was a son of Abraham, and heir to the promises of God's covenant. He could not hide who he was a moment longer – he had to stand up and be counted as belonging to Jehovah. This would have massive implications to his life and comfort. So be it. He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

Moses' faith made him decisive. There was a world of difference between Egypt and Israel. The pagans had all this life could offer, and God's people could only boast of a hope beyond their bonds. But he had rather suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for this season. His identity gave birth to his will.

But it could only do so because of Moses' perspective. He saw beyond this world into the next, even prior to his burning bush experience. He knew that Egypt was smoke and mirrors as all believers see this world. Its gold is cankered, its treasures are moth eaten, and its promises are empty. There is no fulfillment in the treasures of Egypt. True riches reside without the camp, where our Christ gloriously bears the reproach of this world. The lens of faith cannot see things otherwise.

All of this sprang Moses into action. His faith worked. It forsook Egypt, and, like his parents, shunned the wrath of the king. Yes, the backside of the desert would be difficult, but it would lead to the Promised Land. If we are to inherit the promises, we must follow the narrow way and the straight gate. It was so with Moses, and it will be so with us as well. Oh, but the recompense of the reward!

Let us be inspired by the faith of Moses. Let us remember who we are, what our destiny is, and where our treasure lies. This will spawn in us a separated life pleasing to Him Who calls us, and yield for us a realization of His promises that is exceedingly abundantly above anything we could ever ask or think.

– D. Murcek

Modern Molechs

*Little children, keep yourselves from idols. I John 5:21
I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour. Isaiah 43:11*

Men have erected their false gods in defiance of this exclusivity. Idols come in varied forms and it behooves believers to detect their manifestations so as to deter their intrusion upon our sanctified walk. To say American culture is changing at breathtaking speed is to state the obvious. Social, moral, and legal constraints are abrogated with rapidity as the philosophical idols of historicism, humanism, sensualism, and pseudo-science have co-opted the forum of ideas. "Cancel Culture" has now launched its vitriolic vendetta against all free speech and thought that doesn't find compatibility with its definitions of acceptability.

Idolatry in its broader sense is properly understood as any substitution of what is created (be it money, lust, political governments, social constructs, ad infinitum) instead of the creator who made all things. In the first chapter of Romans, Paul excoriates the idolaters of this world and concludes that they "worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator".

Josiah was an iconoclast before the term was coined during the reformation. He understood that there was to be no leniency allowed regarding idols, else the image of the beast would insinuate itself into the body politic of the people of God and its corrosive influence would vitiate the entire congregation. In many ways Josiah's task was far easier than ours today. The idols of his day were tangible objects that were purported to possess efficacy in regards to the current and future estate of the worshipper. The destruction of the idol would be a graphic illustration of its own inefficacy. Clay, wood, and plaster, though gilded in gold, would still easily succumb to a few inexorable blows of the sledge.

The idols of our current epoch are intangible and abstract and thus far more difficult to root out and destroy. From our earliest developmental years we have been programmed to accept the idolatry of humanism, statism, sensualism, philosophical relativism, and natural selection as espoused by public education and the media. These corrupt ideas are firmly entrenched in the psyche of so many of our unsuspecting population. But when the Holy Spirit convicts the mind of "*sin, righteousness, and judgement*", He provides for us the advantage of a renewed mind. And with that regenerative power we can "*gird up the loins of our mind*" and take up the task of demolishing these imposing idols. Our Lord tolerates "*no other gods*" before Him.

Have blessed week,

Pastor

What We Truly Long For

For we that are in this tabernacle, do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

2 Corinthians 5:4

If any one has ever gone backpacking, they have experienced the feeling of carrying a heavy weight mile after mile. At the beginning of the trailhead, when the pack is first put on, it feels comfortable being masked by the excitement of a new adventure. After several hours though, the pack is no longer as comfortable and the burdensome weight is felt throughout every fiber of the body as each step is taken. The wonders of the scenery lessen as the obsession grows to complete the day's hike so the body can be relieved of the cumbersome backpack. At the end of the journey, being relieved of the burden and finally finding rest is exhilarating.

Life is a journey with a mixture of joys and burdens. In infancy we enter the world crying, then learn to laugh at the simplest things and cry when discomfort comes. Solomon who was endowed with divine wisdom, penned *there is a time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, and a time to dance*. We enjoy the lighter times of laughing and dancing, but they are often overshadowed by the times of weeping and mourning. When we first come to Christ for forgiveness and salvation, there is a feeling of being cleansed and relieved of the burden of sin. But in our Christian journey we will likely encounter many times when the curse of this present world encroaches us. Our burdens may be physical or spiritual, they may be things that happen to us personally or they may happen to people we love. If the fruit of the Holy Spirit fills us, we have a residing joy that can help to minimize the weight of the burden, although the burden may still be there. Today's verse reminds us, while we are in this earthly body we will groan. For every physical ache and pain, for every spiritual burden, for every new trial, we groan. The groan is a response emanating from our soul because we want to be delivered.

Thankfully, we may experience some temporary deliverances throughout our lives to give us hope that the Lord will come one day soon to eliminate the curse and restore His creation. For now, we can rest in His promises until that day when we finally lay down all of our burdens and groan no more.

J. Ekis

Saying and doing

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

I John 3:18-19

The principle expressed here by the apostle John pervades the gospel message. Jesus pronounced this message at the beginning of His ministry when He declared “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). From what follows there, it is evident that doing the will of the Father acceptably requires a relationship with Him, and not empty claims of “wonderful works” done ostensibly in His name. Such a relationship is described by the apostle Paul as “God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). Thus, doing the will of God from the heart is that which pleases God rather than men (Ephesians 6:6), and therefore requires more than mere profession; it requires the truth of His indwelling Holy Spirit working in, and out of, the disciples’ lives.

As John presents numerous tests of true discipleship in his epistle, he here describes the love of a true disciple for his brethren to be one manifested in deed and truth, instead of just professed with words of the tongue. This is also borne from a common bond created by one Spirit who dwells within all true disciples, as John declared at the beginning of the epistle: “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (I John 1:3). He then adds the manifestation of such love to his list of evidence that assures the heart of the true believer, as he previously stated: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (v. 14). May God enable us in opportunities to demonstrate in truth the love that He has shed abroad in our hearts.

The River of God

There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. – Psalm 46:4

Believers have no need to drink from broken cisterns of the world. God has planted each of His beloved children in close, life-sustaining and life-strengthening proximity to the river of water of life. Its streams meander ever so gently, winding their way through each of our experiences in contributory fashion to the powerful flow of hope and peace that calm our hearts amid any and every trouble.

The river of God is a place of calm that makes us glad when by all natural inclinations we should be in turmoil. While the world (whether at large or in the tiny sphere of our private life and living) is raging with the insanity of heathen hatred and the incessant threat of wars and rumors of war, or is groaning and travailing in pain together under the heavy weight of the curse where disease, pain, sorrow, and death that mar our everyday experience, we can make our way quickly within to God's wonderful river.

Here at the river, we can be still and know that He is God. This reminds us that, as He has been with us in time past, He is with us even now. While the infernal breath of our enemy can be felt upon the neck, the river recalls for us that it is not our action or our planning or our cunning that brings the salvation of the Lord, but our stillness. The deliverance from the press behind us and through the sea before us is carved by each step of quiet, resolute faith.

Here at the river, we can drink of the water of life. Terrestrial life has its moments of wonder and joy, but the waters of eternal life are both abiding and pure. There is no tainting of this river. Clear as crystal, this must not be merely sipped but rather quaffed by weary souls unsatisfied by life below. This river flows invisibly straight through the tabernacles of the most High here on earth – the heart of each of God's dear children. He has graciously provided us access to its life-giving force so that we are familiar with it when we drink from it unendingly in our heavenly home.

The river of God is also a well and a spring. Our Lord Jesus said so (John 4:14). Our faith has provided us this well in the deepest recesses of our being. Here we can draw from its flow and find strength for every trial. The Spirit Himself is the river's source. When necessary, its current can and will sweep us to where we need to go, positioning us perfectly in the center of His will. We need never thirst here upon the banks of God's river. Even when we feel as though our strength is all but gone, we can find renewed strength and power in abundance in these everlasting waters – strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.

Dear reader, are you availing yourself of God's wonderful river of water of life? This is an open secret that our gracious God has shared with all His dear children. Cup your hands and drink heartily. The river flows for you. – D. Murcek

It's No Secret

For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Familial relationships are usually and naturally the closest of all earthly relationships. The inherent qualities and the volume of intimate time spent together help to forge the strongest of bonds. Even when there are times of internal strife and conflict, the blood bond cements the unity of family. Over time as common experiences increase, so does the strengthening bond.

It's common to hear Christians say "I want to grow closer to the Lord" or "I need to be more spiritual". So how does someone grow closer to the Lord or become spiritually stronger? Surely there are more than enough books and seminars available to guide us in how to accomplish this, *but* the perfect outline for this is found within the pages of God's Book. Today's verse reveals that anyone who not only desires but also exerts effort to do the will of God is able to enter into a relationship akin to being a brother or sister of the Lord. The blessing of the word of God is not only in hearing it, but in also doing it. *Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it. (Luke 11:28)* Growing closer to the Lord begins with us. He is always willing to draw close to us, but He patiently waits for us to desire a deeper bond with Him; when we do draw closer, the Lord reciprocates by drawing closer to us. *Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. (James 4:8)* Our knowledge of God and understanding His ways is a growing process. Because He is infinitely superior in all things and beyond our comprehension, if we truly know Him, we will always want to know more about Him and we will always long to grow closer to Him. God's manifestation of Himself to us is often incrementally revealed as we read His word and apply it in the daily situations and circumstances of our lives. Our compliance speaks of our love for Him and He then assures us of His love for us. *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. (John 14:21)* Abiding in Him and He in us is what makes our life more fruitful and fulfilling,

Every day is another opportunity to grow closer to the Lord. There is no secret formula for quick success to achieve this, but if we draw close to Him and hide His word in our hearts so that we may obey it, we can hear Him say; "this is my brother or my sister".

J. Ekis

Be ye also patient

*Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.
Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge
standeth before the door.
James 5:8-9*

After exhorting his readers to patient endurance under trials at the beginning of this epistle, James now exhorts them to patient waiting, using two different but related words in the original Greek language. How much our Lord knows our need for both kinds of patience. In our text, the immediate application is the patient waiting for the coming of the Lord, that He might bring justice to those that have selfishly oppressed his readers. At the same time, he reminds them against exhibiting selfish attitudes toward other disciples, since the same Judge for whom they wait is also about to come to judge their own attitudes, motives, and behaviors. Be careful how soon we wish for things to come to pass!

We have been conditioned by our culture to expect to have what we need or want immediately, whether it be relief from oppression, vindication, or satisfaction of our desires. Yet the example of the Lord and His word teach us just the opposite. Often there is much time required for goodness or justice to come to fruition in the case of this fallen world. Throughout the scriptures we are reminded of the longsuffering, or patient waiting, of God for men to come to repentance. Through the book of Acts we see the apostles faithfully obeying the commission of the Lord to preach the gospel, even as they wait for oppression to cease or for people to come to faith. Yet in spite of all we learn, how often do we find ourselves impatiently responding to people and circumstances. Somehow we think that we deserve better, with no defensible basis. This is nothing more than selfish pride, left over in the old man that still clamors within. Let us instead, like the farmer, faithfully plow life's ground that God brings to us each day, and then be also patient for Him to bring the right to pass, in His will, and in His time.

His People

Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves. We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. – Psalm 100:3

God is covenantal, not coercive. He seeks and desires fellowship with man, permitting man to exercise his God-given will to respond and enter into deep and abiding fellowship with his Creator. Once bound by the sacred terms, dual possession occurs. For the believer, He is no longer known merely as God, but my God; Christ is not just the Savior, but my Savior and my Lord. Likewise, to God we become “His people” – a special and peculiar possession to Him, redeemed from the cesspool of the curse-ruined, sin-sold mass of humanity. God’s covenantal nature, and therefore the nature of His covenant, brings both solemn responsibility and humbling privilege. We do well to meditate for a moment on what it means to be “His people.”

As His people, we are His representatives, ambassadors from a kingdom not from here. As such, we are to be separate from the world – living in it but exercising ourselves continuously not to be (or even appear to be) of its fabric and culture. This means we conduct and comport ourselves differently than we once did when we strangers to the covenant. We make sure that our speech is heaven approved and Spirit ordained. We meticulously govern our actions to reflect the royalty of our Father. We set our affections on things above and not on things of earth. We ensure that our appearance aligns with what would be expected of a heavenly embassy – modest and unassuming. We are watchful not to adopt the manners and customs of those alienated from our God, paying close attention to detail as those who must one day give an account of our stewardship of our mission. We have been given much, and from us, much will be required.

As His people, we are also the apple of His eye. Adopted sons and daughters of the living God, we possess special access to His heart. Because of the blood of the covenant, shed for us by our Lord Jesus, we can ask what we will in full confidence that He hears us. What a privilege to know that we may cast all our cares upon Him because he cares for us! When in battle, we may be troubled on every side, but we are never forsaken; we may be cast down, but we are not, nor shall we ever be, abandoned. He that delivered up His only begotten Son awaits to freely give us all things – all things for life and godliness; all things to be more than conquerors; all things to the extent that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which in in Christ Jesus our Lord.

How remarkable that we can call Him our God. Even more astounding, that He so graciously endears us as His people. May we live today in the fulness of that sacred bond. – D. Murcek

Will Power vs Spirit Power

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Galatians 5:16

Following Christ is the right and true path, but it is not an easy path. With all the joys and amazing experiences God provides, our journey will be tested with trials and tribulation. Our Lord said so when He said: *In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world* (John 16:33). Believers would do well to learn to recognize the traps and assaults of Satan as they must engage in spiritual warfare against him. Because this battle is not merely against flesh and blood but against spiritual wickedness in high places, we need much more than will-power to resist all that our adversary hurls against us.

Today's verse gives the formula for combatting the flesh. Though we become a new creature at conversion, the old nature still resides within us and has the potential to rise up in the many struggles of life. The only effective way to defeat the flesh is to yield to the Holy Spirit within us. As believers in Christ, we are to carry ourselves about through every circumstance of life relying on the Spirit to help us in reflecting our love for the Savior. *We that were sometime darkness, are now lights in the Lord, and we should walk as children of light* (Ephesians 5:8). This can only be accomplished when we are trusting and walking in the Spirit. Just as Satan found an avenue through which to tempt Adam and Eve, he will seek the most persuasive way to allure us through the flesh. If we neglect the spiritual feeding from reading and meditating on God's word, or become complacent in private time with the Lord, we will make ourselves more vulnerable to the fiery darts of the devil. Each moment of every day presents an opportunity to meditate on God's word and apply it in our daily lives, which enables us to utilize the power of His word through the Spirit within us. Just as we so easily yielded to our sinful nature before conversion, we should quickly yield to the Spirit's leading when temptations come. He that overcame the world two millennia ago has given His Spirit to empower us to overcome that same world today.

It can be very beneficial to have some level of strong will-power, but that alone is not enough to stand against carnal temptations. When we walk in the power of His Spirit, we equip ourselves to gain victory over the things that once so easily beset us. Let us exchange doing battle through our limited will-power with walking in the power of His Spirit so that we might gain the victory. ~J. Ekis

Sure word of prophecy

The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power.

Daniel 8:20-22

The prophecy before us was given to Daniel as part of his second prophetic vision during the reign of king Belshazzar of Babylon, as stated in verse one of this chapter. The first vision in chapter seven represented the earthly empires, beginning with Babylon, by various beasts, with parallels and throwbacks to Nebuchadnezzar's dreams that Daniel had interpreted in earlier chapters through divine revelation. This vision drills down to a subset of those kingdoms with two more beasts, a ram and a rough goat, representing the next two empires to come, after Belshazzar would be defeated by the Medes and Persians in Daniel's lifetime. This second vision's interpretation is given to Daniel by the angel Gabriel. In both visions there are aspects that are revealed in part, but others that remain mysteries. In later times, more of the mysterious aspects of these visions have been revealed simply by comparing them to world history. While Daniel lived to see the fulfillment of the Media-Persian empire (the ram), the historical escapades of Alexander the Great, the king of Grecia represented by the goat, and his conquering of the Persians and more, would not be known until later generations.

The accuracy of these visions given to Daniel during the time of the Babylonian reign is so amazing that there are liberal "scholars" who have decided to believe that the book of Daniel was actually written centuries after Daniel's lifetime, rather than believe in the power of God to reveal these things to Daniel at the actual times that he recorded in his writing. It is the nature of the unbelieving world to deny plain recorded facts, instead of embracing the Lord and His word that demonstrate such power and mercy in revealing Himself to mankind in this way. In contrast, let us simply see and believe the plain revelation that God has set before us, and rejoice that He would provide such evidence that His word is trustworthy. As there remain aspects of Daniel's visions that are yet to be revealed, we can be confident that the Lord's plan will be worked out, both in earth and in heaven, until the proclamation of the final chapter is fulfilled: "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3).

Shaking Off the Beast

And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. – Acts 28:5

This succinctness of the text demands our attention. It reveals not merely a remarkable physical apostolic miracle, but a vital spiritual truth. Paul's miraculous safety from a viper's venom is the Spirit's reminder to us of our right and privilege as sons and daughters of the living God. Our serpentine adversary frequently projects his intimidating head from his infernal habitation in an abrupt ambush, sometimes hitting his target (us) with pin-point accuracy and injecting his damnable venom into our hearts and minds. We feel the bite, perhaps even momentarily paralyzed by the surprise and force of the attack. But due to the power of God's Holy Spirit within and the blood of the everlasting covenant, we possess the ability to repel the otherwise lethal assault with heaven-granted authority. The Word of God reminds us repeatedly of our heaven-issued license to continually and effectively repulse the devil.

In His wilderness duel with the arch-foe of mankind, our Lord rebuffed the adversary with a power so simple it is sublime. "It is written" was enough to thwart the tempter's deceptive entreaties on three occasions, and a final, "Get the hence" from the lips of the Son of God sent Satan away to re-strategize.

This same jurisdiction over hell has been vouchsafed to our spiritual arsenal by our Lord Himself. In Luke 10:19, He stated, "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you." Indeed, such authority is ours because of Him to Whom we belong! This is why the Bible is replete with reminders for us that because of Christ's victory, our enemy's bark is much worse than his bite. Consider the simplicity of the following exhortations regarding spiritual warfare...

"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7) It is a basic yet critical principle. Proximity to the Savior equals unquenchable power over hell. Drawing nigh to God defangs the most ferocious demon hordes.

"Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet" (Psalm 91:13) It is unequivocally clear of whom this is speaking. It is that ancient serpent, old Leviathan – Lucifer, the fallen. He does not and cannot own the child of God. To the contrary, our stomping footprint should be all over his wretched being because our Lord crushed his head.

"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper." (Isaiah 54:17). Sweet promise! Wonderful truth! Nothing – nothing – that the devil brings our way can harm the heirs of the Kingdom.

As Paul shook off the viper into the fire, so let us cast off the devil until the coming day when he will be forever banished from ever advancing again, when "the devil that deceived them [shall be] cast into the lake of fire and brimstone...[to be] tormented day and night forever and ever." (Revelation 20:10). Lord, haste the day! – *D. Murcek*