

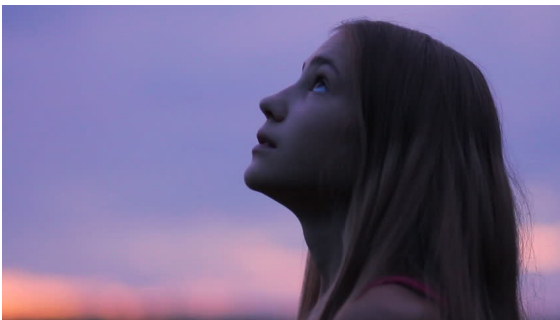
***Looking Up In Times Of Distress***  
***A Lenten Message Series on the Book of Daniel***  
**North East United Methodist Church**  
**March 4, 2018**

A young boy finally got to go on a voyage with his father...they set out with hundreds of others for the new world...The young boy was excited to finally be of age to help his father...to work on the ship...and jumped at the opportunity when asked if he wanted to help by climbing the mast and keeping a lookout from the crow's nest atop.



The young boy ran to the rope ladder and began to climb, but half-way up the ladder he looked down and began to get disoriented...dizzy...things began to spin...His father looking on, proud of his son, saw what was happening...a common problem...and yelled to his boy, *"Look up...Look up."* The boy looked up and the dizziness went away; he was able to finish his climb to the safety of the crow's nest and complete his mission.

Daniel also knew the secret...the secret to stop the disorientation, the dizziness...to deal with the heartache and suffering and threats the world threw at him...to stay focused, following God and doing what's right even when the world would attempt to lead him astray...Daniel knew the secret...*"Don't look down...Look UP!"*



In our story today, we find Daniel, having been brought from Jerusalem, living in Babylon during the second year of King Nebuchadnezzar's reign. And King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream.

Daniel 2: 1-6 (NIV) - *In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means." Then the astrologers answered the king, "May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it." The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me."*

God knew exactly how to get Nebuchadnezzar's attention...Had a prophet come and delivered the same message he probably would not have attached any supernatural angle to it...But he believed, as did all of ancient Babylon, that the gods sent messages through dreams.

And this dream struck him like a hammer.



Verse 1 says that Nebuchadnezzar's "*mind was troubled*"...this phrase could be translated, "*his spirit was struck*." The New American Commentary shares that the root "*pa'am*" means "*to strike*" as with a hammer or an anvil or a bell. This dream struck Nebuchadnezzar's spirit like a hammer, leaving his heart pounding...

He woke up afraid, disturbed, confused...he woke up troubled. Therefore, he called in his chief magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers to interpret the dream, but he wanted to be sure...the dream was so powerful...he believed the gods had spoken to him...he did not want to miss the message...so he challenges the magicians and others to tell him his dream first and then interpret it...Nebuchadnezzar wanted to make sure the interpretation given was not false...so he asked that the one giving the interpretation could also describe the dream without being told what it was...It is also possible that Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten part of the dream – it was vital, he believed, that the entire dream be interpreted...that the message from the gods would not be lost.

The magicians, astrologers, sorcerers all plead their case...*"No one can tell you your dream,"* they answer...

Daniel 2:10 (NIV) - *The astrologers answered the king, "There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer."*

Daniel 2:12-13 (NIV) - *This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.*

Nebuchadnezzar is desperate...he threatens the magicians, sorcerers and astrologers...such decrees, such dismembering of enemies was a common practice in the ancient world...The magicians and others knew to take the threat seriously, but they were powerless to save themselves. They always had been.

God had made this clear a century earlier, speaking through the prophet Isaiah about Babylon...

Isaiah 47: 12-15 (NIV) –

*Keep on, then, with your magic spells  
and with your many sorceries,  
which you have labored at since childhood.  
Perhaps you will succeed,  
perhaps you will cause terror.*

*All the counsel you have received has only worn you out!  
Let your astrologers come forward,  
those stargazers who make predictions month by month,  
let them save you from what is coming upon you.*

*Surely they are like stubble;  
the fire will burn them up.  
They cannot even save themselves  
from the power of the flame.  
Here are no coals to warm anyone;  
here is no fire to sit by.*

Nebuchadnezzar will find no warmth from his counselors...no satisfaction...no comfort.

The story continues with Daniel hearing about what has happened...the decree the King has made...

Daniel 2: 16-18 (NIV) - *At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him. Then Daniel returned to his house and explained*

***the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.***

As Beth Moore writes, “*The threat of being cut into little pieces is enough to keep the toothpicks in your eyelids.*” Daniel, along with his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, prayed and I am sure they prayed hard and prayed long, throughout the night.

During the Thirty Years' War in the 17th century, German pastor Paul Gerhardt and his family were forced to flee from their home.

One night as they stayed in a small village inn, homeless and afraid, his wife broke down and cried openly in despair. To comfort her, Gerhardt reminded her of Scripture promises about God's provision and keeping. Then, going out to the garden to be alone, he too broke down and wept. He felt he had come to his darkest hour. Soon afterward, Gerhardt felt the burden lifted and sensed anew the Lord's presence. Taking his pen, he wrote a hymn that has brought comfort to many.



***"Give to the winds thy fears; hope and be undismayed; God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears; God shall lift up thy head. Through waves and clouds and storms He gently clears the way. Wait thou His time, so shall the night soon end in joyous day."***

Daniel understood the truth sung about in this famous hymn...*"Give to the winds they fears; hope, and be undismayed...God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears; God shall lift up thy head."* Daniel knew to *"LOOK UP!"*

Daniel was at a crisis point. Imagine going to see the powerful, temperamental king who had just angrily ordered your death! Daniel did not shrink back in fear, however, but confidently believed God would tell him all the king wanted to know. Daniel found his three friends and they prayed.

- What powerful, temperamental king are you facing?
- Is it cancer, surgery, or grief? Is it financial stress, the loss of a job, an addiction?
- Do you find yourself shrinking back in fear or confidently believing that God will lead you, will tell you what's next?
- Have you shared your need with other friends who know God's power, who believe?
- Have you asked them to pray with you concerning the power you are facing?

Are you looking down at the problem and getting dizzy OR are you LOOKING UP?



So Daniel prays...and God answers, giving him wisdom, helping him understand not only what the dream was, but the interpretation of the dream...

Look at what Daniel does next...He praises God...

Daniel 2: 20-23 (NIV) - ***“Praise be to the name of God forever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king.”***

Daniel continues to “look up,” giving God the credit, the praise...Look at Daniel’s praise...it begins...verse 20 with “Praise the name of God...for HE has all wisdom and power...He control...He removes...He gives...” But then Daniel shifts to...“I thank and praise YOU...for YOU have given me...You have told me...” Daniel has a very personal relationship with God...He has spoken to God before...they know one another...and Daniel has learned that he can trust in God for all things...

Daniel goes back to King Nebuchadnezzar and interprets the dream...



Look at whom Daniel immediately gives the credit to, before explaining anything to the king...

**Daniel 2: 27-30 (NIV) - *Daniel replied, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you were lying in bed are these: As Your Majesty was lying there, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive, but so that Your Majesty may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.”***

Daniel is quick to give God credit

Daniel then explains and interprets the dream...



...a dream of a giant image of a man...the head made of gold, the chest and arms silver, its belly and thighs bronze, its legs iron, its feet partly iron and partly clay. And the image was destroyed by a rock, carved not by human hands, which struck the feet, turning the statue to dust. Daniel goes on to interpret this dream and how it represents the

four kingdoms that would dominate as world powers: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome...and how all these great powers would be brought to an end by the Kingdom of God which will continue forever.

Then what does King Nebuchadnezzar do...

Daniel 2: 46-47 (NIV) - ***Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery."***

By looking up, not only is Daniel and his friends saved...but King Nebuchadnezzar and others in Babylon recognized the power of God and honored Him.

G. B. Duncan wrote, *"There is no place like the feet of Jesus for resolving the problems that perplex our hearts."*



And as Samuel Chadwick wrote, *"The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, he mocks at our wisdom, but he trembles when we pray."*

There is only one place to look as we face the trials that life throws at us...we must look up. God cries out to us, through the prophet Isaiah...

Isaiah 45:22 (The Message) - ***"So turn to me and be helped—saved! - everyone, whoever and wherever you are. I am God, the only God there is, the one and only."***

God cries out..."*You are my child...I am here for you...simply look up."*

Like Daniel, may we take our eyes off the problem and gaze to the heavens; it is there we will find our answer.