

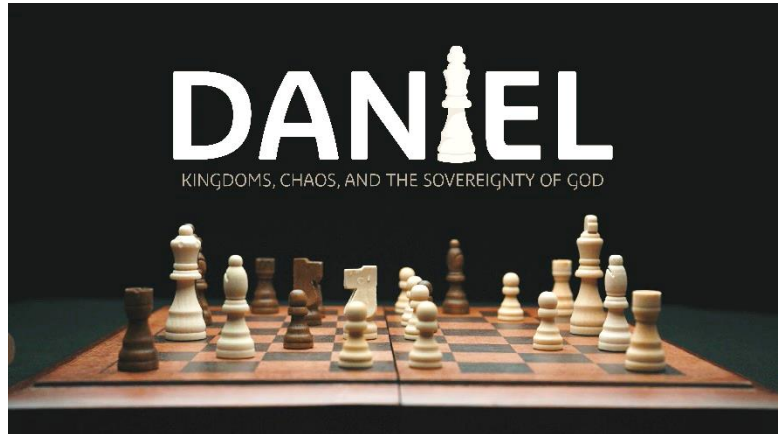


VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

When the Going Gets Tough...

DANIEL: Kingdoms, Chaos and the Sovereignty of God

Daniel 10
Tim Badal | April 7, 2024



Turn in your Bibles to Daniel 10. Before Easter, we were

in a series on the book of Daniel called “Kingdoms, Chaos and the Sovereignty of God.” It’s been an awesome journey through this Old Testament book that was written about 600 years before Jesus came to put His stamp on human history. This was a pretty dark time for God’s people. The book opens with Daniel as a young man, living in a land where the people worshiped and honored God, until a great army from the Babylonian Empire ransacked Israel. One thing the Babylonians did that was different from other empires was they took the best and brightest of the conquered peoples to their capital city. That’s how teenaged Daniel was taken from his family to Babylon, 700 miles away—in what is now modern-day Iraq—where he remained for the rest of his life.

In the chapter we’re looking at today, Daniel 10, Daniel was then 80 years old. He had spent most of his life in a country that worshiped foreign gods and had foreign traditions and rituals. In the earlier chapters, we read how Daniel learned to navigate this very pagan culture while still honoring God.

As we learned, Daniel and his other Jewish friends not only met this challenge successfully, they also advanced their position in that kingdom, eventually being promoted to leadership roles in the government. But in spite of this, there were times when they encountered significant persecution, during which God miraculously intervened to protect them. We saw this happen when Daniel’s friends would not bow down to Nebuchadnezzar’s statue and were thrown into a fiery furnace. We saw this when Daniel was thrown into a lion’s den. This serves as an encouragement to us as well, with our own society growing darker and more hostile to things of the faith and as we’re challenged to live God-fearing lives in our day.

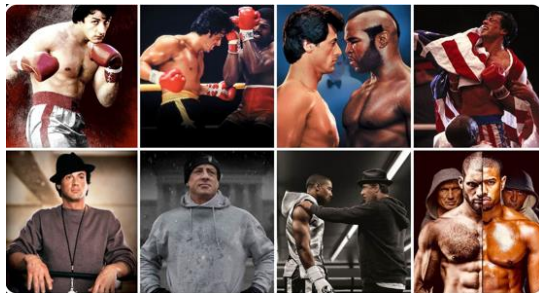
As we transitioned from Daniel 6 to Daniel 7, and for the remainder of this book, we move from the discussion of the events in Daniel’s life to a series of visions and dreams that reveal what will be coming in the future. These visions and dreams can be broken up into three parts. Some of them have to do with what’s going to happen during Daniel’s life and we’ve already seen that. Daniel learned that 70 years of captivity would be the length of time the people would remain in Babylon, after which God would let them return to Jerusalem. We’ll see the fulfillment of that in our passage today.

The second set of dreams and visions talk about what happens after Daniel’s life up to the coming of Jesus Christ, covering a period of 600 years. Then there are things being communicated through Daniel’s visions, which are also reinforced in the New Testament, that point to future fulfillments. We’ll learn more about these in the next two chapters. In that sense, Daniel 10 is the prologue to the final two chapters in this book.

If you’ve ever participated in racing, there’s usually some way of signifying that you are on the final lap of the track. In auto racing it’s a certain flag that is waved as the first car enters that final lap. In track, you might hear a pistol being fired, telling the runners that they are now on their final lap. This is the time when they need to kick it into high gear. That’s where we find ourselves in Daniel 10, as we’re beginning the last leg of the race. There’s much to be excited about and much to learn from it.

There's an old saying that just rolls off the tongue: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." It doesn't matter what age you are or what your lot in life is, this is just something we know. In studying that phrase, it's hard to know where it came from. A lot of people claim to have started it. But that doesn't matter because it's a good statement. When things get hard, it's going to take a unique person to raise it to the next level, to switch it into a higher gear, to go places they've never gone before, to push themselves in ways they've never done before.

Hollywood loves to tell stories. In the heart of the Rocky series, Rocky Balboa runs into trouble after trouble with a new opponent and a new set of hindrances. Rocky tries to figure it out. Usually he's defeated in the middle of the show, only to take it to a new level by the end. Even if the stories are make-believe, we love them. We begin to feel a little more empowered. If Rocky can do it, we can do it.

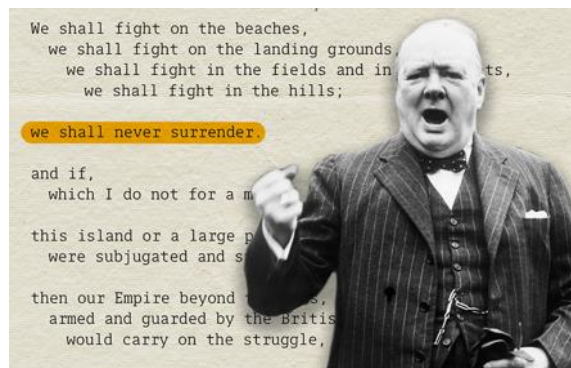


Then at other times Hollywood tells true stories, but they'll add their spin to it. There's probably no better example of that than the movie "Hoosiers." We're in the middle of March Madness which reminds us of that movie. In it, a small-town Indiana basketball team goes up against all odds and makes it to the championship game. I won't tell you what happens, but if you watch the movie, you'll see that when the going gets tough, the tough get going. They take it to another level.



So what about real life when our back is against the wall? There's no better human example than a man in 1940 England. Nazi Germany had decimated all of Europe. In a manner of a few short months, they took over the continent of Europe. Adolf Hitler and his generals were filmed standing at the Eiffel Tower. In one video they were looking across the English Channel, mapping out how they would destroy Great Britain, which was the last piece of Europe left to conquer. In the early 1940s they had flown squadrons of planes over the island of Great Britain, terrifying the British. They weren't dropping any bombs, but they were saying, "We're coming." Every military scholar says that Great Britain could only hold out for a couple months, then the war would be over in Europe. The Nazis would prevail and our world would be very different.

It took one man, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who stood in front of Parliament and essentially said, "When the going gets tough, the tough have got to get going." In one of the most historic speeches in all of human history, he told the British people and the enemy, "We're going to fight on the beaches, we're going to fight on the landing grounds, we'll fight you in the fields and streets and hills." In essence, "We'll fight you wherever we have to." Then he said, "We shall never surrender." That's taking it to the next level. That's telling the world, "We're not going to go away softly or stand idly by and just let this war overtake us."



So why am I bringing all these examples up, whether Hollywood or real life? Daniel 10 is going to tell us we're in a battle—a battle much larger than we may comprehend. It's easy when the battle rages to become demoralized. It's easy to get knocked down and discouraged. But Daniel 10 can do for us what Winston Churchill did for the British people. This is encouraging us and strengthening us so we can participate in the battle the way God wants us to.

It is easy to despair about current events.

I'm going to give you a sentence that I hope will encourage and equip you. It starts this way: "It is easy to for us to despair about current events." Can I get an amen? It is easy to be distressed and discouraged—you can choose other words that start with 'd' and put them there—because of current events. We can easily feel like we're losing. We can easily be depressed by the state of our world today. Let's face it. Our world is continually becoming more pagan and more hostile to the things of God. We know

how God has told us to live and order our lives, but we are now under fire. Yet every other approach to living is celebrated. It's easy for us to be filled with despair.

Daniel 10 gives us encouragement, specifically for our day. Daniel is 80 years old and has been in captivity around 70 years. Now he knew from the prophecies that the Babylonian captivity would only last 70 years. In fact, based on this time stamp, the captivity would have been over for three years. As Daniel looked around at the landscape of his people and the world around him, he was despairing. He uses the word 'mourning.' He mourned over what he saw. Let's find out why in Daniel 10, beginning in verse one: *"In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar. And the word was true, and it was a great conflict..."* This was not a good word; this was a bad word. What we're going to see in chapters 10-12 are scary things. Daniel 10 is a reminder to shore us up for what's to come, to prepare and help us to not despair. You won't want to miss what we will read starting next week.

The rest of verse one tells us that Daniel *"understood the word and had understanding of the vision."* Look at verse two: *"In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks."* He was not happy. He was hurting and grieving and he did so for three weeks. It specifically impacted him physically. *"I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks."* Daniel didn't do much during that time. It was hard to get out of bed. He didn't shower. Why? He was hurting. There was no reason to get up.

Some of you have been there in your life, where you despaired. You didn't feel like eating or even getting out of bed to take a shower. Everything was hard because you hurt so bad on the inside. What's causing this for Daniel?

You might be thinking, "Tim, didn't you say that what he's been praying for the last 70 years has come true?" Yes. The people of God had been allowed to go back to Jerusalem. It doesn't mention that here, but we have been given other writings that record the events of those days. Specifically you can find out about them in the books of Nehemiah, Ezra and Haggai. In fact, Ezra is where we learn that the people of God had actually returned home. Ezra 1 begins with these words: *"In the first year of king Cyrus of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled..."* God had told Jeremiah that the captivity would last 70 years: *"the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing."* Here is what Cyrus said:

The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord.

Let's understand what's happening here. You go home today after church, you turn on CNN, Wolf Blitzer comes on and he says, "Breaking news. Congress has affirmed some things. They got it wrong on God. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the true God, so they have ruled through legislation that they're going to decree a federal holiday. They have said, 'We're going to give federal money for the people of Village Bible Church and every other local church to do the biggest work project that's ever been done. Here's a million dollars. Start making your campuses look as beautiful as possible.'"

Number one, can we agree that would be a miracle? We wouldn't believe it. But this is exactly what happened. A pagan king told the people of God, "I believe your God is number one, so I want you to go back and make sure His temple is built beautifully. I'm going to give you paid time off; I'm going to let you go inhabit your land. Plus I'm going to give you all the money and resources you need to do this." That happened three years prior to chapter ten of Daniel. Why in the world would Daniel be distressed? Why would he be mourning? Because out of the couple million Jews living in the Babylonian Empire, only 40,000 returned. You can read about this in Ezra 2 that gives us an inventory of the people. Including where they came from and where they went. The sad thing we hear in that chapter is that most of them were elderly. Most of them were AARP certified. They went back to their homeland, but they were too old to get involved in a building project.

So now three years have passed and notice what Haggai says in Haggai 1:2: *"Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord."* This was a handful of years after Daniel 10 and Ezra 1. Then the word of the Lord came to Haggai, saying, *"Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses?"* We're talking exquisite. They've built their own lives. Even though their houses are well established, God's house—the temple—still lies in ruins. God tells them, *"Consider your ways."* Rethink this. Daniel is sad because God had done His part, but the people had not. There are four reasons why the people had not done their part.

Worldly opposition was strong.

According to Nehemiah, there was a small band of people who started to build the temple. They were excited about doing it, but they soon became discouraged because bandits and foreign invaders came to stop the work. It's not easy to build a temple if you're constantly looking over your shoulder because you're afraid someone is going to kill you. Nehemiah even commanded the builders to have a trowel in one hand to lay the mortar for the stones and bricks, and a sword in the other hand. But that would slow down the process and that's just what was happening.

The people of God were stymied in their work.

Second, the construction stopped. What should have been a time of great advance became a picture of desolation. In fact, their enemies mocked them, saying even though they had been given this great gift from Cyrus, they weren't able to reach their goal. Why was this?

The people of God had been seduced.

Third and most importantly, the people of God had been seduced because most of God's people in Babylon liked living in that pagan land more than they liked living in God's land. So the vast majority of the people weren't even interested in going back to Jerusalem. After all, their children had married Babylonians, so they had adopted the worship practices and beliefs of the world around them. They were fine with immorality, as we read in great detail in the various Old Testament books. They had been seduced.

God seemed to be silent.

Finally, Daniel was discouraged because God seemed to be silent. God had not given a message to His people in many years. Daniel was thinking, "God, You said 70 years" and he was assuming everything would get better then, but it hadn't. In some ways, the excuse of being in captivity had shrouded the spiritual desire of God's people.

So let's think about this as it relates to us. Could this be a description of us today? Are we living in a world where opposition is strong? Yes. Are we living in a time when it seems like God's work is stymied? Yeah. Now, here's the problem. Village Bible Church is a bit of an outlier. We're seeing growth like we've never had before, and I am forever thankful for that. Of course, it has its challenges, but the more people are eager to hear about Jesus and invite Him into their lives, the more this is a good thing.

However, we also need to remember a couple things. First, we're just a blip on a much bigger screen, and on that screen things aren't growing like they are here. Especially in America, interest in Jesus is declining. And not just a little. We're falling off a cliff. Where we see this the most is not in the 80-year-old Daniels, but with the young people. We have a problem with young people. Young people have a problem across the board with the church and, seemingly, with God. So while in this moment we might be thinking about how God is doing great things in our church, in the larger view America is losing the battle.

The biggest reason why, I believe—and you can call me judgmental or pessimistic—is because the people of God here in America have been seduced. We like our Babylon. We like the movies Babylon gives us. We like the music it gives us. We like the celebrities we're given here. We like how we can spend money like the Babylonians around us. We like how they live in their homes, the cars they drive. We love all Babylon has to offer us. So when God comes through His Word and says, "Hey, people of God, I need you to do something," we reply, "Thanks, but no thanks." We are completely content with where we are. And for some, that's quite discouraging.

I saw a tweet on X by a pastor who said, "Pray for me, because I'm going from the peak to the valley. We just had record attendance in our church on Easter Sunday, then we went to one of the lowest attended Sundays the week after. I'm heartbroken over that." The reason this happens is we live in Babylon. Not only do we live here, we love it here.

It throws us for a loop when we hear that Daniel prayed and fasted for 21 days. I realize this was written 2,600 years ago. I also realize I'm being a bit melodramatic here, but I don't see any mention of streaming. I don't know how they got their information, but somehow Daniel heard about the spiritual condition of God's people. It was enough to make him stop everything else he was doing in order to dedicate himself to praying that things would change.

Let's look back at our lives this past week. How much were we in God's Word, listening to what He has to say? How much were we in prayer? I've shown you the studies and I know none of you are them, but on average over four and a half hours a day are spent on screens, because Americans love what Babylon is producing. We don't have time or energy or desire to know what God is doing. The prophet of God is discouraged even to the point of mourning and I think it might be good for us to mourn a little bit ourselves.

Take heart, God's deliverance is available to us.

Here's the thing. Do we have to stay here? The answer is no. In our mourning, in our sorrow, in our conviction, God sends a messenger. Aren't you glad the sentence didn't stop with "It's easy to despair"? All right, everybody go home; may God have mercy on your soul. While it's easy to despair about current events, take heart, God's deliverance is available to us.

Look back at our passage, beginning in verse four. Daniel says, *"On the twenty-fourth day of the first month"—so three days later—"as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris)"—which is in modern-day Iraq so this is a real place—"I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist."* He is describing the significance of the angel he's seeing.

⁶ His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude. ⁷ And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. ⁸ So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. ⁹ Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground.

¹⁰ And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. ¹¹ And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling.

¹² Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words."

Some of us need to hear this. We have prayed and although God's answer hasn't yet come, we need to be assured that we have been heard. God goes on to explain why Daniel had not yet gotten an answer.

¹³ The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, ¹⁴ and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come."

Daniel is seeing an awesome angel, who tells him, "I have come from God to do three things for you." I believe God will also do these same three things for us.

1. The angel came to encourage Daniel.

God could have been angry with Daniel. He could have said, "Why are you discouraged? Why are you looking with earthly eyes instead of heavenly eyes?" But He doesn't. We'll see later in the text that God tells Daniel, through this angel, "You are greatly loved." That word loved means to be cherished, but God adds the word greatly to make it even stronger.

We too are loved beyond measure by God. We are cherished beyond treasure. Even when we're discouraged or depressed, God still loves us. If we're happy or sad or somewhere in between, God loves each one of us, cares for us and has a plan for us. You need to remember this because God is near to those whom He loves. God is concerned about the things we're concerned about. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5:7, *"Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."* God wants to know what bothers us. We are greatly loved, and God has come to encourage us this morning.

2. The angel came to explain what was going on.

Daniel had prayed and wondered why God hadn't answered his prayer. This is where it gets a little weird. The angel says, "I was on my way to give you the answer to your prayer; then as I was passing over Persia, a demon stopped me." We're like, "Whoa! Did I read that right? Did I have too much coffee this morning?" Yes, I read it correctly.

In response to Daniel's prayer, God has sent a messenger—a lower angel—to bring His answer to Daniel. As he passed through Persia, where Daniel was, he was held back somehow by a demon. This demon was called the prince of Persia; there were lesser demons called princes of Persia. Later on we'll see that the angel had to fight against the prince of Greece.

This tells us something about the heavenly realms around us, which is that there is a cosmic battle going on. That's why Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:12, *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."* Even though we can't see it, there's a war going on around us.

For 21 days, a battle was waged in order that the angel could bring this message to Daniel, yet for 21 days the demons prevailed. I know that challenges some of our theology, but we should always remember that ultimately God has won the war. Still, there are apparently skirmishes still being fought. Then on Day 21, God sent one of His most powerful angels—Michael the archangel—who enabled the other angel to at last reach Daniel. So the battle was finally won, then the messenger-angel began to relay what God had sent him to tell Daniel. In essence, he pulled back the curtain and said, "There's a lot more going on than meets the eye."

We also need to realize that there's a whole lot more going on than what we can see, hear, and feel. There's a battle going on, my friends. If we truly understand this battle, one thing that would change is the way we pray. We pray about things that are temporal. We focus on things that bring us comfort. "God, fix this. God, take this away. This hurts me, so surely it isn't Your will. Take this problem, this pain, away from me."

3. The angel came to give Daniel strength.

So let's consider what God wants us to do. When Daniel received God's answer to his prayer, we start to understand what Daniel had been praying for. Let's pick up at verse 16:

¹⁶And behold, one in the likeness of the children of man touched my lips. Then I opened my mouth and spoke. I said to him who stood before me, "O my lord, by reason of the vision pains have come upon me, and I retain no strength. ¹⁷How can my lord's servant talk with my lord? For now no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me." ¹⁸Again one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me.

That's the first thing. *"And he said, 'O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage.'"* That's number two. And number three, *"And as he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, 'Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.'"* Three times there's reference to Daniel being strengthened.

So what had he prayed? This is so important. In his despair, Daniel had not prayed, "Lord, fix this problem." Rather, his prayer was, "Fix me in the midst of this problem." We often pray in our small groups, "Fix the problem. This hurts, Lord; fix it. This person isn't happy with me; fix it."

What Daniel prayed was, "Lord, the problems that are here may be here forever. Change me. Change my understanding. Give me the strength to endure this for Your glory and my good." This would radically change our understanding of prayer. Daniel models the truth that prayer is more about us being changed than it is about making requests to God. Not that those are wrong, but they should be the tip of the iceberg.

When we're asking God, "Change me and renew me, so I am where You want me to be, regardless of the circumstances You have put me in." Far too many of your pastor's prayers are, "Change the circumstances," instead of, "Make me more like Your Son Jesus. Make me more like Daniel. Move in my heart. Change my heart before you change the circumstances."

Which makes our way clear.

This is what God does. He offers us strength. He gives us words of affection, plus he says deliverance is available for all of us. God has a plan and a purpose which makes our duty clear. What are we supposed to do? I so badly want to get into Daniel 11, but I'm not going there today.

At this point in Daniel's life, we can see a couple things. First, what is our duty when things are stressful to us? We are to pray, we are to be committed to the Word of God and we are to walk closely with God.

I heard a lot of amens when I mentioned this is a despairing time we live in. Are we praying more? Are we in the Word more? I can tell you that as the church continues to grow, which is a good thing, the average number of times we attend in any given month has gone down. Also, small group involvement has grown stagnant. When we call people to be engaged, serve and pray, there hasn't been the fervor to respond. So I understand that it's a distressing time, but are we just going to sit, complain and bemoan the situation? Or is it going to move us to change? I know this may feel judgmental, but I'm judging myself in this as well. Is where we are right now moving us to become more like Jesus?

That's what God wants in this world. When it's the darkest, God needs the lights to shine a whole lot brighter which means we have to live and act differently than we would when everything is peaceful and easy. That's what Churchill was saying to his people.

Let me finish this message with Ephesians 6. We might be thinking, "Oh, this is just an Old Testament story. Tim, you're taking what is a descriptive passage and prescribing it to a New Testament people." You're right, I am doing that, but the basis for what I'm doing is Ephesians 6. Listen to what the apostle Paul wrote to a people who lived after the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

Did you do that this past week? Did you put on the full armor of God to stand against the schemes of the devil? Just think back over this past week. Were you victorious in the power and strength God gave you? There's a war going on, friends, a war for our souls, a war for this world. God says the way we get through it is by putting on this armor and standing against the schemes of the devil.

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Sounds like Daniel 10, right?

¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

What Daniel was praying, what he was asking God for the strength to do, was to withstand the temptations of this world, to stand in opposition to evil, so that he could stand strong for his God. And in a world where we feel distressed and discouraged, God says, "I will give you everything you need to stand strong." The question is will we do it? Will we allow His Spirit to empower us and fill us so that we can do the work God has for us. Would you join me in asking God to do this, to enter into our time of despair and give us what we need, so that we may honor Him in everything we say and do?