

Lions in the Den of Daniel

Dr. Stephen D. McConnell



Daniel 6:6-27

Maybe one of the most important things to know about yourself is something that we are told at the very beginning of the Bible. At the very beginning of the Bible the truth that gets told about you – and not just about you, but about all creation – is that before the world came into being ... and thus, before you came into being – when there was no form or substance – what we are told is that the spirit of God ... or the wind of God hovered over the deep. The Hebrew word for spirit or wind is the word “ruah”. The world was created through the ruah of God. It was the ruah of God that hovered over the deep. We were created in and through the ruah of God. And what that means is that as created beings we are this mysterious confluence of dust and spirit ... earth and wind ... flesh and ruah. It was God’s ruah that brought together the dust of the earth to make you and me. In fact not long after the Creation when the waters were unleashed again upon the world in Genesis 8 we are told that it was God’s ruah that blew over the waters and began to bring creation back to life. It is how creation happens and it how creation continues – through the wind, the spirit, the ruah of God. Remember when the disciples got together with Jesus after the resurrection and they were ready to make their march on Jerusalem and Rome – and Jesus says to them, “Oh no you don’t. You got to wait. You have to wait for the wind ... you have to wait for the spirit ... you have to wait for the power ... you have to wait for the ruah of God. This is how you will become new creations. Without the ruah of God you are just flesh. You are just scared little men. You must wait for the wind of God to fill you and make you into something you cannot be on your own.

This same word ruah ... is the word used in that great story that we remember from Sunday School when Joshua is leading the people of Israel in the effort to overtake Jericho. And you remember how Joshua orders the people and the priests to march around the city and the priests are to blow their horns. And they do that for seven days. And Joshua tells the people that they are not to shout until the seventh day ... and upon his orders they shall finally shout. So the seventh day comes and Joshua gives the order ... the scripture says that the people gave RUAH. They shouted. They participated in the spirit of God. In the wind of God ... and the walls came tumbling down.

You see, we are dust and we are spirit. We are earth and we are wind. We are flesh and we are ruah.

Now it is this fact – this basic truth about our creation and our new creation -- that helps us to understand this great story of Daniel in the Lion’s Den. Because it is early in this story that we are told that Daniel, an exiled Jew – living in a foreign land serving in the court of the king – we are told that Daniel “distinguished himself ... because an excellent spirit was within him.” An excellent spirit was within him. The word is “ruah”. An exceptional ... an extraordinary ... an excellent ruah was within him. It is the ruah that made Daniel who he was. The spirit distinguished him.

It is safe to surmise that earlier in Daniel’s life he had recognized this fundamental point of creation – that we are nothing without the spirit of God. That the spirit of God hovered over the depths of Daniel’s creation. And it became Daniel’s life and practice and discipline to avail himself of the excellent ruah of God. So at the beginning of Daniel’s story we read of how the foreign king insisted that Daniel eat from his menu of food and wine, but Daniel defies the king and sticks to the kosher laws – because he knows he is more than just flesh ... he is spirit. It matters what he eats ... not because of his body ... but because of his spirit. So in Chapter 6, when the satraps and the presidents get the foolish old king to change the rules around so that everyone has to pray to him – the king – Daniel remembers his own beginning ... he

“We were created in and through the ruah of God.”

remembers who he is ... and who he is is ruah. And so there is no one he is going to pray to except the one who blew the wind of spirit into him.

And don’t you wonder that if it was this spirit ... this extraordinary ruah that was within him ... don’t you wonder if this was the very thing that kept the lions away? It says an angel – but don’t you wonder if wasn’t already the angel that was in Daniel. It wasn’t as much what the angel was doing to the lions ... it was what the angel, the spirit, had for a long time been doing to and within Daniel!

Because you see the truth of the matter is that Daniel was in the den of lions long before he was in the den of lions. Daniel was in the company of lions way back in Chapter 1 the first time they asked him to save his skin. Save your skin ... and eat whatever is put in front of you. Save your skin. And Daniel said, “It’s not my skin I’m worried about ... it’s my spirit I’m worried about. Because I am more spirit than skin ... I am more wind than earth ... I am more ruah than dust.”

Daniel of the excellent spirit.

Remember when Jesus got pegged up onto the cross and the chief priests came along and said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God – then what? Save your own skin!!” And Jesus says, “YOU don’t get it, do you? It’s not my skin I’m worried about! It’s my spirit ... it’s the ruah. And so what does Jesus say at the end of it all? “Father, into your hands I commend my ... ruah!!!”

Jesus of the excellent spirit.

So how about Talia Leman? Talia Leman was a good Jewish girl from Waukee, Iowa. In her first few years of life surrounded by family she thought everybody

in the world was Jewish and never really gave much thought about the world being any different. But then the night before she went to her first day of school her parents sat her down and told her that when she went to school the next day for the first time it would be public school she would likely be the only Jew in the entire school. The only Jew. What’s a young Jewish girl from Iowa to do? Talia explains that when she got this news from her parents she secretly scavenged through the house for every kippah (or yarmulke) she could find and she matched them to the outfits she was planning to wear the first week. Proudly she walked into school the first day donning her kippah and by the end of the first day, she recounts, everybody in her 600 student school knew her as the Jewish girl.

A few years later when she got to the ripe old age of 10 Hurricane Katrina decimated the gulf coast and submerged New Orleans in a sea of water. Talia noticed a girl in her neighborhood selling lemonade to raise money for Katrina relief. She noticed more cars driving past than were stopping so she got the idea to unleash the power of kids with the upcoming holiday which was Halloween. Every kid participates in Halloween. And she put together a relief effort called TLC – Trick or Treat for Levee Catastrophe. She imagined if she could get the word out to kids across the country that while they were trick or treating they would ask for donations for New Orleans they might be able to raise a lot of money. She imagined maybe even as much as \$1 million. The dreams of a ten year old -- \$1 million. Well, she was wrong. She raised \$10 million. Or should I say they – her army of fellow children – raised \$10 million. Ranked among the top five of all corporate donors to Katrina relief.

From there Talia – the good Jewish girl from Waukee, Iowa – developed an organization called RandomKids whose mission it is to link kids who have ideas to help to a certain need in the world with other kids who have the same kind of idea. RandomKids brings together today between 50,000 to 100,000 kids a year to work on helping the world.

Talia of the excellent spirit!!

I like the story of the little girl who was drawing a picture ... and her mother came in and saw her drawing and asked her what she was drawing. Said she, "I'm drawing God." "Oh honey," the mother replied, "no one knows what God looks like." To which the little girl replied: "They will when I'm through."

She of the excellent spirit.

The Irish in me makes me always remember the story of St. Patrick. Remember how long before he was a saint ... he was a slave. Six years a slave. But it is in those six years of slavery the young man Patrick began to pray. Having lost hope that his skin would be saved, he prayed. Said Patrick in his life Confession: "(As I prayed) ... the love of God and His fear increased in me more and more, and the faith grew in me, and the spirit was roused ... so that whilst in the woods and on the mountain, even before the dawn, I was roused to prayer and felt no hurt from it, whether there was snow or ice or rain, ... because the spirit was then fervent within me." The spirit was then fervent within me. After six years the spirit's fervency led him to run away from his captors. He stole away back to England where he submitted himself to training for the priesthood. And then he heard the voice that told him to return to his captors ... to Ireland ... where he brought about the conversion of a country.

We are more spirit than flesh ... we are more wind than earth ... we are more ruah than skin.

St. Patrick of the excellent spirit.

So how goes your spirit? Lord knows there's lions out there. Lions and tigers and bears, oh my. Lots of circumstances that might make us think we're outnumbered. Lots of reasons to think that we might

lose our skin. And if it's your skin you're worried about then you have a whole lot to be afraid of when it comes to those lions. All those things out there that might make you worried -- your bank account, your next doctor's appointment, the stock market, what college you are going to, the leak in your roof, the strange sound coming from the motor of your car, the state of the economy, the direction of the country – all those things that make you worried – all of a sudden you think you're surrounded by lions.

But whose den is this anyway? Whose den is this anyway?

Who was hovering over the face of the deep before you were a gleam in your father's eye? Who was shouting down the walls of Jericho? Who was making lions into pussycats? Who was wearing her kippah on the first day of school? Who was praying to the God of his own choosing? Whose den is this anyway?

Because you know what they say – is that when Jesus was born, they say he was probably born in a den ... in a cave. And just a couple miles away there was old cruel King Herod holding court. Up in Rome cruel Caesar Augustus holding court. Lions and tigers and bears.

But when Jesus was born wasn't it the spirit of God that was hovering over that deep night? The spirit of God hovering with the heavenly host? Wasn't the spirit of God asking, Whose den is this anyway?

Isn't that the advent question? Whose den is this anyway?

I rise today (old St. Patrick used to say):
in power's strength,

.....
Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me;
Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me;
Christ to the right of me, Christ to the left of me;
Christ in my lying, Christ in my sitting, Christ in my rising;
Christ in the heart of all who think of me,
Christ on the tongue of all who speak to me,

Christ in the eye of all who see me,
Christ in the ear of all who hear me.
I rise today in spirit's strength.

Whose den is this anyway? This is Talia's den! This is Daniel's den! This is Jesus' den! This is ruah's den! This is your den. This is my den. And they will most certainly know what God looks like when we're through.



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November 27, 2016
