

Trust God's Mighty Fortress of Grace

✠ **Stand firm in prayer (vv.10-12)**

✠ **Stand firm in persecutions (vv.16-23)**

In the name of Jesus, God's Champion of prayer and protection, dear children of God's grace:

A few years ago in summer school retired MLC Professor Em. Arnold Koelpin addressed the pastors: "How are all you whores this morning?" You can imagine our shock at being called "whores." The professor went on. "That is what God calls us in the Prophets. He says we 'go a-whoring after other gods.'" The professor was right about us pastors. He's right about all of you too. Spiritually speaking, you are all whores who love things and people more than you love God. You hear about Daniel in the lion's den and think, "I would keep on praying too." But you laugh at jokes about Jesus, entertain yourselves with what displeases Him, and fear man more than you fear God. With your hunting buddies you trust in yourself. With neighbors and relatives you compromise in quiet rather than worshiping God. Under God's law you and I deserve the death sentence for whores, prostitutes and criminals.

But look at Jesus. God's own Son was crucified between two criminals. His enemies hated Him for eating with prostitutes and sinners. He came to this sin-cursed earth to marry us whores to Himself, to make what is His mine, and what is mine His. All my unfaithfulness, my whoring after other gods, Jesus took on Himself for you too. All His faithfulness, His holiness, He put on us like a beautiful wedding dress on a gorgeous bride. We love by attraction; God loves by creation. His undeserved love has become for us what it was for Daniel and Luther and countless Jewish and Christian believers in centuries past and yet to follow. **Trust God's Mighty Fortress of Grace.** Then you too will...

✠ **Stand firm in prayer (vv.10-12)**

As far as we know, Daniel had no command from God to pray three times a day. But it's obvious he had been praying for a long, long time. As a young man, he was carried into Babylonian exile with his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These three men had already survived the fiery furnace because Jesus Christ Himself, protected them from the flames and the smell of smoke. Nebuchadnezzar, perhaps the most independently powerful king who ever lived, put Daniel in charge of Babylon with his three friends as administrators. Daniel kept right on praying. The very night that the Babylonian Empire fell, God enabled Daniel to read the handwriting on the wall that predicted King Belshazzar's death and the rise of the Medes and the Persians. King Darius kept Daniel as one of his most honest and trustworthy rulers. And God kept answering Daniel's prayers with wisdom and strength from above.

It's easy to keep praying when the sun is shining. When God answers your prayers, "Yes...yes...and yes," you gladly keep asking for more, more and more. But what if you're surrounded by jealous coworkers like Daniel? What if you're condemned as a heretic like Martin Luther? No church officials would tell him where the Bible proved him wrong. And do you realize that Luther never was granted a hearing before the General Council of the Roman Catholic Church? Nearly 2,000 years after Daniel's trip to the Persian lion's den, the poor Augustinian monk Martin Luther in Wittenberg, Germany, could not get any better treatment from church officials who claimed to rule in the name of Christ. Renaissance popes were worldly, evil men by admission of some of today's Roman Catholic officials. Yet Luther is still considered a heretic, still excommunicated to hell along with everyone who believes we are saved by grace, through faith alone without any other merit. The Council of Trent still stands. Maybe none of that bothers you because we've not shed blood for Christ in America recently. But you and I neglect our prayers for far less reason. We charge headlong into busy days through evenings too entertaining to pray.

This is why we need Jesus, the Man of prayer. We need Him to keep interceding for us along with the Holy Spirit at the throne of our Father in heaven. We need enough trouble and heartache in our lives to put us on our knees in prayer because we finally realize, “I can’t handle this. It’s too big for me. What am I to do now when other helpers fail and comforts flee?” Daniel knew that being liked by King Darius would not save him. Only God could rescue Daniel. Martin Luther often said that help from earthly princes, even Elector Frederick the Wise or his brother and successor John the Steadfast, could not help him against the raging devils and their henchmen in Christ’s visible church on earth.

Someone went to see Dr. Luther in his home and waited outside his study door because it sounded as if Luther was talking to someone. Eavesdropping just a little, the visitor finally realized Luther was praying. “He was talking to God as you would talk to your best friend!” Luther would say things like, “God, if you let us fail at Augsburg when we give our Confession, you will have failed because we have no Mighty Fortress but you, no claim to you but the grace you have promised.” You and I can say, “God, my wife and I are seeking your help for our marriage and for our children. If you turn away and do not grant grace and wisdom and strength, you have failed. For all these gifts you have promised like the treasures stored away in a **Mighty Fortress** where you opened the gates to sinners like me.”

God did not turn away from Daniel. He answered every prayer of Martin Luther. And when you and I keep asking our dear Father in heaven for grace and wisdom and strength, we’re just asking for what God has already promised. He must give these gifts. Because of our sins we do not deserve them, but **“God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”** (1 Corinthians 10:13 NIV) Through the clouds and wind and rain, through God’s silence and discipline, **Stand firm in prayer** and you will...

✝ **Stand firm in persecutions (vv.16-23)**

All the king’s attempts to save Daniel from the lions’ den failed. Darius was not as powerful as Nebuchadnezzar had been. The laws of the Medes and Persians were set in stone and could not be repealed. Daniel was thrown in, and King Darius could offer only this: **“May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!”** A heavy stone, the king’s seal – sounds so familiar doesn’t it? They sealed Jesus’ grave too with a heavy stone and Pilate’s seal and Roman guards. But death itself could not hold the Christ of God. He rose again as He promised on the third day to declare a world of whores like us, “Not guilty!” before God. And **“if God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”** (Romans 8:31f) – **“all things”** like the grace to **Stand firm in persecutions!**

Yesterday in Professor Koelpin’s “Life of Luther” we heard how difficult things got after 1521 when the Emperor and Pope declared him an outlaw, “free as bird” to be shot and killed as freely as a bird in the forest. Kidnapped by his Elector’s soldiers, Luther entered the powerful gates of the lofty Wartburg Castle and could see what **“A Mighty Fortress is Our God, A trusty shield and weapon!”** Troubles and heartaches would continue. **Persecutions** from the outside would prove less harmful to the Lutheran Reformation than the so-called “friends” who became fanatics like Carlstadt and Thomas Muentzer. Former Catholic priests knew nothing of preaching and doctrine. Fathers and mothers could barely read. Luther had to write his *Small Catechism* just to get the clear, historic Gospel teaching into hearts and homes and parishes. But what did Dr. Martin Luther do when loaded down with such heavy responsibilities? He wrote a tender hearted letter to his little son Hans about the wonderful garden God has waiting for us in heaven where the children can run and jump and play to their hearts’ content.

Do you see God’s **Grace** in Luther? Can you see it in Daniel? Do your friends and coworkers experience God’s **Grace** through you? **Trust God’s Mighty Fortress for Grace**, and no one will ever be able to stop you from praying. And while you **Stand firm in prayer**, you will also **Stand firm in persecutions** of all kinds from within and without. God will never let you down because the Lord’s Christ lives in you. For this we praise **God’s Mighty Fortress of Grace** and blessing! Amen.

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