

## Greatly Beloved of God Moderator's Comments Posted 10 December 2019

By Peter Barnes

There is an episode in the book of Daniel where a man – presumably an angel – appeared to the prophet, and addresses him as ‘O Daniel, man greatly loved’ (Dan.10:11). Not many human beings receive such direct revelation of heaven’s declared love for them. Not surprisingly, Daniel himself seems to have been lost for words (Dan.10:15). If we have the faintest interest in God and Christianity, it surely would be our heart’s desire to know something of this.

### HOW COULD THIS LOVE COME ABOUT?

Daniel has been compared to Joseph (one of the twelve sons of Jacob, not the husband of Mary) in that he did not fall into obvious sin as did, for example, Noah, Abraham, and David. Forget the pictures of a youthful Daniel interacting with a pride of lions in the den. Daniel must have been about ninety years of age when he stood up to Darius the Mede, and was thrown into the lions’ den (Dan.6). He had been faithful in tumultuous times, when Jerusalem was under threat from the Babylonians and when the temple itself was destroyed. The apostle Peter struggled to understand everything that the apostle Paul wrote (2 Pet.3:15-16), but Daniel struggled to understand even his own prophecies (Dan.12:8). So Daniel was faithful without being completely knowledgeable.

Daniel was not greatly beloved because of what he knew. Daniel’s great contemporary, Jeremiah, records God’s declaring to His people: ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love’ (Jer.31:3). This is the explanation. Human love is invariably fickle. When the cricket captain scores runs, he is redeemed; when the football team is winning, it is popular. In contrast, God’s love is as eternal as God Himself. Daniel has not earned this love; God has bestowed it, and is given a personal assurance that this is

the case!

### WHAT DOES SUCH LOVE MEAN FOR THE FUTURE?

As Jesus and the disciples gathered for the last night before His crucifixion, the Gospel of John says: ‘Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end’ (John 13:1). They would be sorely tried – struck with confusion and fear, one of their number denying the Master and another betraying Him, and bewildered as to the purposes of Jesus the Messiah in the world. The one lifeline they possessed was that the Lord loved His own to the end. The evangelical hymn-writer, William Cowper, who suffered bitter bouts of depression in his life, imagined the Lord speaking to His people:

*Mine is an unchanging love,  
Higher than the heights above,  
Deeper than the depths beneath,  
Free and faithful, strong as death.*

God’s love is seen in the death of His Son in order to be the Saviour of the world. ‘In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins’ (1 John 4:10). The death of Christ did not win the love of God for sinners. Rather, it expresses the love of God for those far from Him. Propitiation does not mean that His love is gained, but His justice is satisfied. He can therefore be both just and merciful (Rom.3:25-26). Here is holy and compassionate love expressed in all its perfection.

### HOW CAN WE KNOW SUCH LOVE?

If we have been forgiven much, we must love much (Luke 7:47).

God's love is revealed in Jesus Christ, and is received by faith (Luke 7:49-50). We may not hear the angelic word as Daniel did, but we can hear the apostolic word as the Galatians did. To them Paul testified that the Son of God loved him and gave Himself for Him (Gal.2:20). Liberal theology teaches that we are all sons of our Father in heaven, and beloved of Him. Not so! By nature we are His offspring (Acts 17:28), but that saves no one for we are by nature children of wrath (Eph.2:1-3). Yet in receiving Christ, we become God's children not by creation but re-creation (John 1:12-13). 'See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are ... Beloved, we are God's children now ... and ... when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is' (1 John 3:1-3).

### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO KNOW SUCH LOVE?**

Such love is immense, as Paul put it: 'so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what

is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God' (Eph.3:17-19). Nothing in heaven and earth can separate the humblest believer from God's love in Christ (Rom.8:31-39) – verses which prompted Martyn Lloyd-Jones to claim that there is 'nothing greater or more wonderful in the whole of Scripture.' Mind you, he said that of more than one portion of Scripture, but his comment still stands.

Daniel was much comforted in days of threats and trials. The world might be in turmoil, and the covenant people of God devastated, but Daniel was 'greatly beloved.' The Christian can know the same thing, albeit not in the same way. These things ought to be much pondered, that we might keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude 21).

*Peter Barnes is the editor of AP and pastor at Revesby  
Presbyterian Church NSW.*