

“Daniel in the Lion’s Den”

Daniel 6:1-28

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Opening Prayer

Daniel’s final trial that is recounted in scripture is perhaps his most famous one. Daniel in the lion’s den is a story that has withstood the test of time. While all scripture is God-breathed and important, there are certain accounts that just seem to make a bigger impact. This is one of them, because it is so unique. The Lord protects His servant in a miraculous manner, showcasing just how real He is. Daniel, by this point, had served in an advisory role for essentially his entire life. Maybe you are like me, I had never considered before putting together this sermon just how old Daniel was when he was faced with this trial. His other trials took place when he was younger, in his days under Babylonian rule... but this takes place near the end when the Persians have taken control. Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar’s son, and then Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson Belshazzar had all come and gone. Daniel had been an advisor all the way through, and if you were to read chapter five before this on your own time, you would see that the night in which the Persians took over Daniel had read the “writing on the wall” and been made the third most powerful in the kingdom, only to see that splendor evaporate immediately. Following the takeover of the Babylonians by the Persians, in the years to follow, Daniel’s final test comes.

Daniel is in his eighties when he is brought to the den, and is forced to walk once more in faithfulness to the precipice. It is in the 530’s BC that the Persians came and conquered the Babylonian empire. Daniel, now an old man, survived, and found himself again in an advisory role. By this time Darius (possibly the fellow in charge of the Babylonian governance under appointment by Cyrus or perhaps a title of honor for Cyrus himself) comes into office as the new ruler in the region. Faithful his entire life, Daniel was the quintessential man of God, and he was faithful in all that he did. It was these two traits that saw Daniel face the ire of evil men.

Darius’s first order of business in the now conquered Babylon, was to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom. His plan was to appoint three commissioners over those 120, of which he would be the head. Daniel, for his outstanding wisdom and

service given to him by God, is chosen as one of those three. He, just as before, quickly distinguished himself. He was moral, he was wise, and everything he touched prospered. For his outstanding service Darius plans to appoint this old man as the head of the empire, below only himself. Jealousy abounds with the other satraps and commissioners over this news. They, as evil men so often do, devise a plan to get Daniel in trouble the only way they can. They know there is no corruption in Daniel, that he does well by everyone, so they seek to accuse him through his allegiance to God.

These men come before Darius, and they flatter him. “King Darius, live forever!” they cry. They present before him a proposal that they suspect will be swiftly approved. “All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into a lions’ den. Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it may not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked.” King Darius, as expected, signs the document and seals it. The law of the land is officially set. There may be no worship or prayers offered to anyone but him for thirty days. The law is unchangeable, as that was the way the Medes and the Persians operated. (Note that we see such a law like this in Esther as well with Xerxes’s proclamations.) Daniel, when he hears the decree, does as he has done for his entire life... he goes to his upper room and prays as per usual towards Jerusalem giving thanks to God. In clear violation of the law, the satraps and commissioners immediately accuse him before Darius.

It is a situation that all of us pray we are never in, having to choose between following the Lord openly or risking harm. Daniel, who has followed the Lord his entire life and has been saved from certain death multiple times by God’s hands, chooses to serve the heavenly father once again and lay it all on the line. The jealous commissioners and satraps immediately go to Darius and state: “Did you not sign an injunction that any man who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, is to be cast into a lion’s den?” When the king confirms, they spring their plan. “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the injunction which you signed, but keeps making his petition three times a day.” The king, who knew Daniel was faithful and just and true, had no desire to put Daniel to death, but he knows he is stuck.

He cannot violate his own law, and so he seeks to find a way to save Daniel. Unfortunately, there is none, at least not in the human sense and not according to Persian law. Daniel, the elderly man who had served God and man faithfully his whole life, is thus brought to the lion's den.

Lets draw the picture for you, so that you can visualize what it looked like. The den would have been a cave, with a ramp or a door at the base where a large stone or gate would have been placed to keep the lions within. At the top, they would have dug out a hole in the ceiling of the cave to lower in prisoners or criminals or others condemned to die in this gruesome fashion. It was an evil practice, to execute one in such a way. The lions would most likely have been starved, so when prisoners would be thrown in or lowered in, their fate would have been certain. To add even more to the horror, there would be a large stone rolled over the cave top, flooding the inside in darkness for the poor individual who was placed there. Darius the king knows all this, and while he doesn't wish for Daniel to perish, he himself has been made a fool by his own hubris. Darius calls out to Daniel and says "Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you." With that, the stone is rolled over the cave mouth, and Daniel is left alone overnight.

The king has a sleepless night, tossing and turning as he worries about what has happened to Daniel. No doubt he has heard the stories of Daniel from his youth, how Daniel flourished off vegetables and water, how Daniel interpreted the king's dreams, how Daniel's friends were saved from the fiery furnace. Perhaps he has heard these from Daniel himself. When morning dawns, he comes to the den and cries out to the condemned man. "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?" To the shock of everyone, Daniel replies: "O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime." The Lord has done the impossible for His faithful servant once more. The king then takes those who had tricked him, along with their families (Darius's punishment, not God's for the record!) and has them cast into the den. The whole land hears a proclamation about the living God, and Daniel continued on as advisor likely until his death.

What can we make of all this? It is a wonderful account, showing how the Lord can (and oftentimes does) make a way for His children to survive. But I would have you notice a couple more things as we get near the end of today's message. The first is that Daniel's faithfulness would have almost certainly been watched by many. Here was a man of great renown. If you were Jewish and living in this time period, he probably would have been known to you. The great miracles done and the high rank he held had been proclaimed to the empires of Babylon and Persia more than once. He was set to become the second most powerful man in the known world under Darius. People would have watched to see what he was doing. Clearly the satraps and probably many others had taken notice of his faithfulness to the Lord. Darius himself noted as much that Daniel constantly served the Lord. So, when the decree came down that there were to be no prayers made to anyone but the king, others would have taken notice of what Daniel was going to do. Imagine if he had only closed his windows so that none knew he was praying, or imagine if he had simply stopped praying in this manner for those thirty days, or imagine if he had only prayed in his head, or imagine if he had simply not prayed at all... there would have been no accusations against Daniel. He would have continued forward without so much as a hiccup, but there still would have been a great cost. The men and women who knew him, who saw him, including the king, would have taken notice that all it took for Daniel to abandon his faith was a simple decree. It almost certainly would have had a hugely detrimental factor on folks' faith. To bring this into our realm today, I would have us remember that there are many who are watching what we do.

Leading by words and example should be at the forefront of everyone, but especially those who are older. Parents, grandparents, stately elders, and even older siblings and children, you have people who are watching you. They are looking to see what you do in life in general and in particular with your faith. Statistically, what you do is what those who watch you will do. If you hold down a solid job, your children are most likely to. If you take seriously the law and being a good citizen, then your youngsters will too. If you make your faith a priority, then those younger than you will too. The classic example spiritually would be in church attendance. Generally speaking, if parents and grandparents come to church with their kids, then those kids will continue going of their own accord when they become adults. But it gets much bigger than that. If our youth see us being moral and upstanding in our speech and in our actions, then they will grow up learning just how important that is. I once heard a story from a friend in college

of how he often would catch his parents on their knees, praying for him and his siblings at night before they went to bed. Don't you think that had an impact upon him and his brothers? He credited it as one of the most wonderful memories of his youth, and to this day is a faithful believer. Beloved, our actions don't only have positive or negative consequences for us, but also for those who are watching us. Be faithful, and know that your faithfulness has an impact beyond just your own life.

The second takeaway I would leave you with out of this wonderful account, actually has to do with king Darius. The fellow made a horrific mistake, one that was foolish and shortsighted. Having been buttered up by his cronies, he sinned mightily by penning a law forcing idolatry. It was something he came to majorly regret because he liked Daniel. The tossing and turning on his bed at night, pushing away all entertainment and food because he has realized his wrongs and their consequences, is something all of us understand. I think everyone in this room knows what it is like to do something foolish or evil without thinking about it, only to be horrified at the results later and to be in anguish. Maybe it was a word spoken in bad taste to a friend or coworker, or maybe it was something you did to emotionally hurt a loved one, or maybe it was the realization later that you messed up on something big. We have all been there and know that pain. The next time you find yourself in that situation, remember this foolish king with Daniel. Note that while the king was foolish, the Lord's plans were bigger than he could have possibly imagined. Notice how the Lord worked everything through this. No, a happy ending is not always promised, at least in the manner that we would like to think. That being said, God's plans are not so easily thwarted by sinful men. When you find yourself in grief over something sinful committed, take it to the Father in prayer, do what you can to make it right in repentance, and then rest in the fact that God had your foolishness worked into His plans before any of us were even born. The Lord is wonderful like that, and even in our mistakes and sins He can do mighty things, so rest in His grace and mercy and wonderful plans.

Beloved, as we leave Daniel behind and prepare for Jonah, I pray that we would never forget how the Lord works in such wonderful ways. Stuff that is beyond our control can be used for His kingdom. He has bigger plans than what the world can imagine. We are called to be faithful even in the face of great trials... but He always watches over His people in this life and in the next. Beloved, take courage, for your Lord watches over you. Lets pray. **Closing Prayer**