

JUST LION AROUND

DANIEL 6:18-28 JANUARY 9, 2019

We are back in Daniel this evening. We pick up in Daniel 6, verse 18. Last time we were in the text, Daniel had been thrown into the lion's den. We left him in there for the last few weeks. In reality, he was in the den for maybe 12 hours.

But this is the most well-known and memorable story in Daniel's life. And we note that it is the *last* story given in the narrative portion of the book. The book of Daniel is split into two parts. The first 6 chapters are a historical narrative, giving some particular stories from his time in Babylon. The next 6 chapters are no longer chronological, but instead focus on the prophetic visions Daniel received.

By the end of our text tonight, Daniel will be safe. God is once again proven true and powerful and yet another pagan king will have become an evangelistic believer.

As we dive back in, we remember that King Darius had been tricked by his princes and governors into condemning Daniel to death. He didn't want that to happen, but he was powerless under the law. And so, he sealed Daniel in the den, knowing full-well that he had just condemned the *best* man in his kingdom, to death.

Daniel 6:18 - ¹⁸ Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him.

He didn't go home and start fasting and praying the way we see God's people doing so in times of crisis. This isn't a spiritual thing. Darius is sick with worry and anxiety and the guilt of what he's done.

I find it interesting that Daniel writes these stories more from the *other* person's perspective than his own. Of course, Daniel is the author. But think through these last 6 chapters. More often than not, we see the adventure unfolding from Nebuchadnezzar's viewpoint, or Belshazzar's viewpoint. Here, it's *Darius* we spend the evening with, not Daniel.

And, it makes sense. The purpose of these chapters is to proclaim the unstoppable power of God and to show how He acts on behalf of His people. How He is in charge of the flow of history. That the weakest prisoner can be made strong and the strongest king can be made weak. These are the testimonies of the world-changing, miraculous work of the Lord. And if that's the message you want to proclaim, it makes good sense to see it through the eyes of those who were most astonished by what was happening. Daniel is always full of faith and trust. He's consistently calm and collected and confident. But, through Nebuchadnezzar's eyes we see, "Were there not *three* men we threw into the fire?" With Belshazzar we see the knocking of the knees. With Darius, we feel the personal distress.

Daniel 6:19 - ¹⁹ Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions.

The king must have been exhausted that morning. He had spent the previous day, we're told, working until the going down of the sun in a mad rush to save Daniel. Now he had been up all night. No food, no rest.

I imagine he waited quite some time at his window, watching for that first glimmer of the sun on the horizon. At that first light of day, the legal requirement would have been satisfied, and so he (along with an entourage) could run to that chamber of death to see what happened to the best man in the empire. And that's exactly what they did.

Daniel 6:20 - ²⁰ And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"

Darius cried out in anguish. Clearly, he had no *real* hope that Daniel had survived the night. But then he asks a very important question: *Is your God able?* The answer was, obviously, crucial in Daniel's particular situation that day. But it is *still* a very real question for us today, with real significance.

This isn't just a question for *lions*, but for all of our lives. *Is God able?* If you are a Christian here tonight, you can put yourself in Daniel's position and ask it this way: Is God able to deliver you from trouble and from your enemies? If you're *not* a Christian here tonight, then you should put yourself in the place of Darius the King. For him, the question is: Is God able to deliver you from the guilt of your sin? Those wrong things you've done, whether you meant to do them or not condemn you. Is God able to save you from them? This story and all the others we've been seeing, of course, show that the answer is "yes." And we see that, in each case, Daniel *had* this hope. He trusted God to deliver. He *expected* God to intervene and to take action. Do we have that same hope? Do we *live* in that belief, that God is *able*? Daniel did and he lived his life *according* to that belief.

Daniel 6:21 - ²¹ Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever!

He did *not* say, "O King, *GET ME OUT OF THIS PIT!*" He was in no hurry to escape, because (as far as he was concerned) there was nothing to escape from. It was like we saw with Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego in the fiery furnace. They walked around in the flames freely, despite having the ability to leave the furnace as soon as Nebuchadnezzar called them. And so we see Daniel is not afraid. He's not desperate.

He's also not angry or resentful. Look at his response to the very man whose foolishness and sacrilegious pride had resulted in this wrongful punishment. And yet, Daniel speaks to the king with respect, even affection. There's no bitterness or frustration. He responds with grace.

Jesus said in Matthew 5, verse 44:

Matthew 5:44 - ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

Those are commands. This is how the Lord demands we behave. It is wholly unnatural for us, but luckily, God pours out His *supernatural* love into our hearts as Christians. And here we see that it *is* possible to show grace and love even to our persecutors.

Daniel 6:22 - ²² My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you."

Daniel is a great example to us in so many ways. Here he demonstrates how to speak the truth in love. Because, he *hadn't* done anything wrong at all, and he *says* so. Not rudely or in a spiteful way. He's speaking the truth. But that means that the king *had* done wrong in this situation. It was *wrong* to sign off on the blasphemous law. It was *wrong* to send an innocent man to a grizzly death. Daniel here is speaking the truth, but doing so without malice or animosity.

When we read the account of what happened with the angel and the lions, eventually the question that comes to mind is: Why didn't the angel simply take Daniel *out* of the den? After all, wasn't Peter freed from Herod's prison? Wasn't Lot rescued *out* of Sodom? We know angels know how to roll stones away. Why not do that here?

It's helpful to remember the setting of these stories in Daniel. In this book we see God's people living out their faith in a land that is not their home and being used by God to shine like lights in the dark.

In this instance, as in all the others, God was not simply *doing* something, He was also *showing* something. He was using Daniel's life to answer the king's question: *Is your God able?*

God's response to that question was to show that He was not only able to deliver His servant from the *presence* of the lions, but (more importantly) He was able to deliver Daniel from the *power* of the lions. What is the greater miracle? For Daniel to quickly escape from the den or to stay there all night, untouched and unafraid?

How does this help us as Christians today? Well, when we look into the Word of God, we're told that we have some great enemies stalking us. Powerful enemies. But, we are promised that God is able to deliver us from them. What are the 3 great enemies in our lives? Sin, death and the Devil (the Roaring Lion himself). The Bible explains that Jesus Christ has defeated and overcome these enemies and we, His people, no longer need to fear them. God is able to deliver us from them all, and He *will*. However, He's not necessarily going to deliver us from the *presence* of these enemies, but from their *power*.

Romans 6:22 tells us we are delivered from sin. We are set free from its power. Of course, we still live in the *presence* of sin in this world. 2 Timothy 1:10 explains that Jesus Christ has broken the power of death. But, of course, unless we're taken home in the rapture, we'll all find ourselves in the presence of death one day, yet it will have no *power* over us. In Acts 26:18, we're told that, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we're able to turn from the power of Satan to God. He may be present in this world, or come against us, but if we resist him, he will flee from us. We need not fear him.

Each of these enemies are like the lions in the den that night: *Present*, but ultimately *powerless*. And as God's power is revealed through our lives in the presence of these enemies, His truth goes out as a witness to the world. Paul said as much to Timothy while, perhaps, thinking of this very passage in Daniel 6. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:

2 Timothy 4:17-18a - ¹⁷ The Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. ¹⁸ And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve *me* for His heavenly kingdom.

"That the message might be preached fully through me." That's why Daniel stayed the night in the lion's den.

Daniel 6:23 - ²³ Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God.

The work of God brings *joy*. In an instant, Darius' guilt is washed away as Daniel is lifted up out of this pit. God's Good News, His great work produces *joy*. And so, we too should be defined by *joy*.

We're told that Daniel was saved because he "believed in his God." Does that mean Daniel knew he wouldn't die in the den? I don't know. Maybe that's what he expected. Surely he thought about his 3 friends who had walked in the fire and not been burned. But, then again, this was the man whose God allowed him to become a lifelong P.O.W. in the wicked nation of Babylon. Daniel's mindset throughout seems more like Job when he said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." These great men of the Bible prove that it is possible to have a faith like that. Or like Abraham: "Though He slay my boy, yet will I trust Him." "Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food...Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

In verse 24, the joy of the saved is contrasted with the horror of the lost.

Daniel 6:24 - ²⁴ And the king gave the command, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast *them* into the den of lions—them, their children, and their wives; and the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den.

The last time we were in the text we pointed out how these satraps and governors were living examples of the sinners in Proverbs 1 who made their plans to trap the innocent but, in the end, would fall into it themselves. What we're seeing here was the legal custom in those days. It's barbaric to our way of thinking, but it provides for us a couple of significant warnings.

First, it is a reminder to anyone who is not saved that a *ferocious* judgment is coming. If you're not a believer, then you are not like Daniel, who was protected, You are like these men who were, in the end, destroyed. And these guys didn't see it coming. It's interesting...the king had spent his night in the palace, but it was a night of anguish and guilt and fear. Daniel spent his night in a stone death chamber, but it was a night of miraculous wonder. These men? Well, I'm sure they had slept well in their homes that night. It seemed as though their ingenious plan had worked. When they went to bed, nothing stood between them and their own success and power. But then judgment came like a thief in the night.

The second warning we find in verse 24 is this: Your sin has consequences. That's true for all of us, saved or not. When we do not go God's way, that action will ripple out, one way or another, into the lives around us. The lives of our families, the lives of our kids, into our community. Think of the governmental impact of this! All the rulers of the empire were suddenly wiped out! As readers, we're happy to see these characters get what they deserved. But remember how this all started: It all came out of simple selfishness and jealousy. They didn't like that Daniel was in charge. Perhaps on paper a sin like *envy* doesn't seem like a big deal, but look at where it ends up. When sinful "desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."

In the last 4 verses of the chapter we have a little Gospel tract that Darius felt compelled to write and send throughout his kingdom. Like Nebuchadnezzar before him, Darius shows how the work of God

inspires proclamation, like we read in Psalm 105: “Oh, give thanks to the Lord! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples...talk of all His wondrous works!”

Daniel 6:25 - ²⁵ Then King Darius wrote: To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you.

This was a message not just for the Jews or just for the Persians, it was for everyone everywhere.

Daniel 6:26a - ²⁶ I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom *men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel.*

On first read that feels a bit authoritarian, but remember what we read in Psalm 2:11 - “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.” Paul wrote in Philippians 2: “As you have always obeyed...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Darius had been humbled. Earlier he had put himself in the *place* of God, saying that everyone should pray to *him*. Now, he invites his whole kingdom to consider the awesomeness of this One, True God. And we note that it’s not just ‘a’ God, but that there is a *personal* aspect to Him. “The God of *Daniel*.” This is a God of personal relationship. For you tonight, think of this awesome God. Is He simply the God “of the Bible”? Or is He *your* God personally? Is He the God you serve and worship and trust? If so, we are to go on serving Him in fear and trembling. According to Paul, that’s the Christian way of life. He told the Corinthians, “I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.”

Darius goes on to make wonderful statements about God.

Daniel 6:26b - For He *is* the living God, And steadfast forever; His kingdom *is the one* which shall not be destroyed, And His dominion *shall endure* to the end.

These are not just run-of-the-mill omissions. Darius and Daniel have been talking. You see, in Daniel 7 we will learn about a prophetic vision Daniel had during Belshazzar’s reign. In that vision, Daniel is told about the Son of Man whose Kingdom and dominion are everlasting. It’s clear that Daniel has shared this information, which ultimately includes the fall of the Medo-Persian empire, with Darius, who wrote this tract, not only praising God for His power, but *believing* in the prophecy that had been revealed and then telling people about it. The Lord’s coming Kingdom is absolutely real and is absolutely on its way.

Daniel 6:27 - ²⁷ He delivers and rescues, And He works signs and wonders In heaven and on earth, Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

God is still the same. He is no less strong, no less faithful, no less active. He continues to work through us to reveal Himself and impact the world. You and I are *invited* to sign on and be a part of verse 27, and that is an astounding thing.

Daniel 6:28 - ²⁸ So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

The term “prospered” there can mean “to be promoted.” Bible dictionaries also define it this way: “To make progress.” Or, “the advancement in the construction of a building.” Those are *great* images for us this evening. Probably none of us are going to be promoted to the office of Vice President, the

way Daniel was. But his life is still a wonderful example of how the Lord wants to work through His people. And how we can continue to progress and be built up in our faith.

Wherever you find yourself, whether in a hostile work environment or a peaceful one, surrounded by friends or by conspirators, we know these things to be true: First, this is not our forever home. Daniel was a stranger in Babylon, we are strangers on this earth. There is a much greater aspect to our lives than whatever temporal city we find ourselves in. Second, we know that God has *power*, not just generically, but *personally* for us. He is *able* and He is *our* God. What great thing might the Lord do in us this week? In these narrative chapters of Daniel we've seen that even small parts of life can be used for amazing purposes in God's hands. Daniel's prayer life. His demeanor. Even his *diet* were all used to preach the message and produce power. The living God intends to do this kind of work through our lives. How do we connect and cooperate with those intentions? By faith. That was the key. Daniel's faith and his Spirit-filled life made him the hero that inspires us. He *knew* God, he *knew* His Word and Daniel *believed* with a real, faithful trust. And the rest was the history we've read here. The story of God doing what God *still* wants to do for you and I and all who believe.