

Sunday, July 14, 2019

Daniel 6:6-28

### Daniel in the Lions' Den

Our second suggested topic for our Summer Series "At Your Request" focuses on a portion of the life of Daniel which is a favourite story of many because of corruption, deceit and death. Essentially this story plays out like a regular program on TV except for one thing what is the main focus of conflict is Daniel's faith.

Daniel is a young man who was an Israelite taken to live in Babylon and in time came to be known as an interpreter of dreams and a prophet. Daniel was also a faithful man of God who lived in high ranking of authority of the kingdom. When King Darius ascended the throne Daniel became one of three presidents over the king's governors. King Darius planned to appoint him over the whole kingdom because an excellent spirit was in him and he was regarded as a good man. But the satraps (governors) and the other presidents tried to find grounds for complaining against Daniel. Yet they could not because he was faithful and no negligence or corruption could be found in him. The only grounds for complaint against Daniel is in his connections with the law of his God.

The conspiracy against Daniel begins when these key leaders go to King Darius and express, "O King Darius, live forever!" And with this asks the king to establish an ordinance or edict that states no one is to pray for 30 days to anyone divine or human except to the king. King Darius signed the document into law.

Daniel knew about this law but he continued to go to his house and went up to the upper room and got down on his knees three times a day to pray to God and to praise him just as he had always done. Soon after, the conspirators came to his house, found him praying and Daniel is seeking mercy from God.

The conspirators go to King Darius and tell him about Daniel describing him not as a president of the land, but as an exile from Judah who 'pays no attention to you or to the edict he signed into law. Daniel was continuing to pray three times per day. Upon hearing this, what could King Darius do? He became distressed and wanted to save Daniel but he had signed the edict and could not go back on his word as this was now the law.

The King commanded that Daniel be brought forward and was thrown into the den of lions. Have you ever thought why were there lions in a den or lower level of a palace in Babylon? What

purpose did lions serve in this place and when we think about lions at all most of us want to envision lions like in “Born Free” the movie or even in the ‘wild’ as described by the animals in the movie “Madagascar”. Did the king really house lions or is this a metaphorical understanding of enemies within the court? Some scholars wonder if Daniel really faced real lions in a real lions’ den but where would our story or teaching lead?

In the time of Daniel, royalty who owned exotic animals or birds were considered extremely wealthy and because of their wealth they could own animals which really served not to feed anyone but just to exist. The king who owned lions was also considered powerful because he contained, maintained, cared for and controlled lions, the king of beasts. Through this the king acquired extreme power over people and animals alike. This might have been the case for King Darius to have lions as he needed to show his power over the people and so written decrees with punishment would have been a deterrent or a means to scare the citizens into following the law or else they would face death by being put in the lions’ den.

But lions do not normally live in a den as shown in many depictions of this story. But if the king wanted lions, he had them in the lower levels of the courtyard where they were watched over and fed and cared for by lion keepers. Today lions do live in the wild and those that are kept for learning and observation are in free range enclosures in zoos. But the lions in Daniel’s story were kept by the king under his command and were used as a deterrent for unacceptable behaviour.

So Daniel is put into the den of the lions and a stone was laid on the mouth of the den. The king sealed the stone with his own signet along with that of the lords so that nothing might be changed concerning the prisoner. King Darius then left the den and went to his palace. Darius did not eat, did not have any entertainment, and he could not sleep. These were the effects of Darius’ failure to discern the conspiracy of his officials against Daniel.

But what happened in the lions’ den with Daniel? Was Daniel given a special gift like a horse whisperer? Donald K. Campbell writes in Daniel: Decoder of Dreams quoting the Prophet-Statesman about what took place in the den near the palace.

*As the guards closed the aperture and went their way, Daniel slid gradually to the floor of the den. The big lions that had come bounding from their caverns at the inflow of light, all stopped suddenly short as a steed reined up by a powerful hand on a bridle. The initial roars died away as they formed a solid phalanx and looked toward this man who stood in their den in easy reach. There was some*

*snorting, and a little whining, and some of them turned around and went back to their caverns. Others of the great beasts yawned and lay down on the floor, but not one made a move to advance toward their visitor. "Thanks be unto Jehovah," breathed the prophet. "He hath stopped the mouths of these fierce beasts that they will do me no harm."*

*He sat down on the floor of the den and leaned his back against the wall to make himself comfortable for the night. Soon two cub lions moved in his direction, not stealthily or crouching as though to make an attack, but in obvious friendliness, and one lay on each side of Daniel as though to give him warmth and protection in the chilly dungeon. Presently their mother an old lioness, crept over and lay in front of the prophet. He gently stroked their backs as they each turned their heads and licked his hands. Enclosed by the lioness and her cubs, the head of the patriarch was gradually pillowed on the back of one of the cubs as the four slept soundly in perfect peace and tranquility. (from Bill Crowder, Living With Courage in a Changing World: Daniel)*

Early the next morning, the king who had not slept and worried deeply about Daniel hurried to the den of the lions. He cried out anxiously, "O Daniel servant of the living God, has your God whom you faithfully serve been able to deliver you from the lions?"

Daniel responded, "O king live forever. My God sent an angel and shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me, because I was found blameless before him and also before you, O king, I have done no wrong."

King Darius was exceedingly glad and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den and it was found that no harm had come to him because he had trusted in his God. The king commanded that those who had conspired against Daniel as well as their children and wives were to be thrown into the den of lions. And this is the gruesome part—"before they reached the bottom of the den the lions overpowered them and broke all their bone in pieces.

What occurred next is what is so amazing! King Darius wrote to all people and nations of every language throughout the whole world; May you have abundant prosperity! I make a decree that in all my royal dominion people should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. The King then gives reasons for this\_ God is living and endures forever; God's kingdom will never be destroyed and his dominion has no end. God delivers and rescues, he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth; for he save Daniel from the power of the lions! And as an epilogue, Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Why is this an important story in our learning about God and our relationship with God, His Son Jesus and the Spirit?

King Darius declares that God is \the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. For only by faith in God could any man have 'shut the mouths of lions (Hebrews 11:33). For Daniel was a faithful man and for Christians to live out their faith we must understand that God is sovereign, omnipotent and His will permeates and supersedes every aspect of life. God's will takes precedence over everything and everyone. God's way is perfect (Psalm 18:30) We must trust God and our responsibility is to obey, and submit to what His will declares for us so that he might receive glory (Romans 8:28) Because Daniel had trust his God, no would was found on him.

Daniel was a faithful man who had distinguished himself amongst his peers and had exceptional qualities. Because of this it was difficult for them to find fault in his capabilities and so they found that 'he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent". The only thing they found in him was that he was devout in faith and so they used this against him.

We might not think that there are Christian martyrs today who face their own 'lions' den' or death. But they do exist because not everyone believes in God and are willing to accuse and persecute Christians. Darius recognized the power of God in Daniel. Daniel had turned to God in faith and because he was saved, Darius commanded the people to worship God. A whole nation came to know and revere God. Darius' faith grew and his trust in God was stronger.

But what about us who have heard this story before; what is it that compels us to want to hear it again? What difference might it make for us today? When we see the image of Daniel in the lions den we often imagine Daniel facing the ultimate test between life and death. And for him as for many faithful people today when we face death—we're good either way—for to die means to be with Christ Jesus right away or to live means being able to tell others how to get there with us. Daniel prayed that the lions wouldn't consume him and so did King Darius. It was because of a change in attitude by the king that a whole nation came to know of and have faith in God.

We might also see ourselves standing like Daniel as he awaited being put down in the den. There is fear in his mind, his heart is pounding because those who have accused him seem to have won victory. Yet it is just a matter of a day when the truth emerges that we learn how God sealed the lions' mouths and how he was safe. But it is in those moment when others accuse of doing something wrong we question our whole lives and wonder what is happening for our sake.

As Christians, we follow Jesus whom we know faced not a lions' den with possible death, but the cross upon which he died. Jesus knew that his life would lead to his death but what is different is that he rose again. And because he lives we can face every challenge and take every opportunity to grow in faith. Through faith we are assured of God's blessings in Jesus. We have nothing to fear if we truly strive to live the way of Jesus- with compassion, care, love and hope in our hearts. But we must declare our faith in God like King Darius did and pray that others will follow and come to know Christ Jesus.

As we consider Daniel's faith story, let us also consider our own story of faith. How do others perceive you? Would they call you a good person and would they recognize God's Spirit within you? Would others have difficulty finding negative things about you? Or would they find something and you could share and show how God forgave you? Daniel's life was on the line because of his faith. Would/Could this ever happen to you because of what you and in whom you believe and have faith? Do you dare to be like Daniel? Do you uphold your faith and are you living by faith?

Let us consider this as we come before God in prayer.

Holy God of grace and love, we praise you and thank you that by faith we know that you will never leave nor forsake us. By faith you have shown us the way to live and love others through Jesus our Saviour and by faith we need not fear the den of lions but are able to stand up for what we believe and can tell others why Jesus makes a difference in our lives. Hear us O God and enable us to grow stronger in faith so that the whole nation will come to know you and love you as we do. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.