



Living in the Lion's Den
Daniel 6
GCSP - 06/12/2010

(Pass out green index cards)

We live in a time where few things seem to make sense anymore; everything is upside-down or backwards. It seems like good gets punished and evil gets rewarded. Hard work is overlooked and incompetence is promoted. The prayers of the righteous seem to go unanswered and the desires of the ungodly seem to be fulfilled. Fathers and mothers abuse and murder their own children, and children abuse and murder their parents and grandparents.

Many times we experience unjust criticism, are slandered, misrepresented, and are purposely lied about. People who we thought we could trust turn their backs on us at the drop of a hat. Friends and family alike let us down time and time again.

Jesus and the Apostle Paul, among many others, prophesied about times like these:

Paul said, **"But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power..."** (**2 Timothy 3:1-5a**).

Jesus said, **"See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars...For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes...they will deliver you to tribulation, and they will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold"** (**Matthew 24:4-14**).

Because of the situations and circumstances we find ourselves in over and over again, the Bible is replete with admonitions to stand firm, be diligent, endure to the end, have faith, believe, and trust. The writer of Hebrews tells us to fix our eyes on Jesus because he knows that if we look to the left or to the right we will be tempted to become disillusioned and disheartened.

David cries out to God and asks Him to restore the joy of his salvation because Satan and the stresses and strains of living this life on earth, steals that joy away at every twist and turn. Our plans go awry so often and we are disappointed so often that if we are not oh so careful we will contribute to losing our joy.

Tonight, we will look at one of the most familiar accounts in the Bible; one of the stories you grew up hearing in Sunday school. It's the account of Daniel in the lion's den. I was going to

entitle this sermon, "Lions in Daniel's Den" but I think "Living in the Lion's Den" is more appropriate for the direction God has taken me in preparing this sermon.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Daniel**.

Let's pray before we read tonight.

Daniel 6:1-5

Darius is the third ruler that we know of, under which Daniel lived while in captivity; with Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar being the other two mentioned in this Book. Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar were true monarchs, meaning they were sovereign and ruled as they saw fit. Darius was an appointed ruler who had to abide by certain rules and laws; rules and laws that he apparently took seriously. Darius still had great authority but in many ways his was a shared rule and authority.

Darius appointed 120 satraps, or governors, to rule over the various precincts and territories of the kingdom. He then appointed three commissioners for these governors to report to, thus Darius primarily dealt only with these three concerning only the most pressing needs and issues. This style of government was ripe for corruption as men jockeyed for position to grab more and greater power and influence; not unlike the democracy in which we live in many instances.

One of the three commissioners was Daniel. Daniel quickly distinguished himself by carrying out his duties with complete integrity and diligence. Daniel didn't play politics and he was not interested in garnering more power; he simply did what he was appointed to do with excellence, and he never took advantage of his position like the vast majority of government officials do.

Daniel fulfilled his responsibilities so well that Darius determined to expand Daniel's duties to be in charge of the entire kingdom instead of just one-third of it. This meant the other two commissioners would have to report to Daniel and thus be accountable for how they conducted business in the kingdom. Whether out of jealousy or out of fear of having their corrupt ways exposed, the other two commissioners desperately attempted to bring an accusation against Daniel to stop this reorganization from taking place.

The Bible says, "**But they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him.**" There was absolutely nothing they could dig up to accuse Daniel on any front. He wasn't lazy on the job, he didn't take advantage of his position by misusing the king's resources, he didn't base his standard of operation on how the other two commissioners were doing their job; he simply followed the law of God and did his work accordingly.

The Apostle Paul gives us God's standard many hundreds of years later: "**Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve**" (**Colossians 3:23-24**). And again Paul says, "**With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men**" (**Ephesians 6:7**).

Whether we have a paying job or are rendering our service in a volunteer manner, the example of Daniel and the commands of Scripture show us that we had better be excellent

and have impeccable integrity in the carrying out of our service. Our standard is to be much higher than that of world or what we think our bosses expect or deserve. Our boss is the Lord and our standard is what He expects and deserves from us as His ambassadors and representatives. God expects the service we render to be of such quality and integrity that the world stands up and takes notice and sees a marked difference in comparison to how others work.

If people observed everything you do and don't do in carrying out your responsibilities, what would they be able to find and use against you? The other two commissioners could find nothing to bring against Daniel; they were stumped and at a complete loss after all of their digging was done. So they determined that the only way they could trip Daniel up was to somehow cause a conflict between his duties in the kingdom and his devotion to God.

Daniel 6:6-9

The other two commissioners lie to the king; it was their only course of action to hang onto their power and corrupt ways. They trick the king into signing a law that prohibits anyone from petitioning any god or man besides the king for thirty days, knowing full well that Daniel prayed to his God in full view of others, three times a day. And because Darius was not a monarch who could do as he chooses at any time, he was bound by the laws of the land even when he is the one who puts the law into place.

Daniel 6:10

Notice first of all what Daniel does not do. He doesn't complain about the law. He doesn't go to the king and reveal that he had no part in this whole business even though the other commissioners lied about Daniel being a part of this suggestion to the king. He doesn't seek revenge or lash out at those who have in essence signed his death warrant. And he doesn't cry out to God about how unfair this is. There is no indication that Daniel even questions God as to why this has happened to him.

Instead, as soon as Daniel knows the law is in place he continues to do what he has always done; he opens his windows, kneels down and prays to his God in full view of those in the kingdom.

Before we move on, let's make sure we don't miss any applications we can make to our own lives from this verse.

First, how devoted are you to prayer? A simple comparison here would be to that of having a meal. I would bet each of us in here tonight are pretty consistent at eating three meals a day. So are you at least as devoted to prayer as you are to eating? – And I'm not talking about "*Lord, thank you for this food, amen.*" Do an inventory; if you eat three times a day and it takes you 15-30 minutes per meal, how does that compare to your prayer life? I'm not proposing you turn your prayer life into a ritual of sorts or that you time your meals and your prayers so you can tally them up each day, but that you give it some thought and make any changes the Lord impresses upon you.

Secondly, how much do you trust the Lord? If prayer was outlawed in our country and it was a known fact that you prayed openly three times a day, would your practice change? Would you stop praying or would you only pray when in complete seclusion when nobody else could see? Or would you brush aside what man could do to you and trust in God alone?

Thirdly, how thankful are you in difficult times? This verse says Daniel thanked God in his prayers three times a day. Daniel has been in captivity since he was a 12 or 13-year old. He was probably castrated as a young teenaged boy as that was the custom when put into the service of the king, as he was under Nebuchadnezzar so the king didn't have to worry about his wives and concubines. He most likely never saw his parents again when taken into captivity or possibly even witnessed their execution. He never experienced the joy of having a wife or children or grandchildren. He never owned a home or a piece of property. At this stage of his life he hasn't even seen his home country for almost seventy years. He knows he will soon be arrested and thrown into a pit with a pride of hungry lions, yet he thanks God.

Daniel does not allow the changes in his circumstances to affect his devotion to and trust in God. Daniel understood what every Christian needs to understand: Circumstances and conditions and good times or bad times come and go, and our attitude toward any of these stations in life should be God is still on the throne, He still loves me with an everlasting love, He still promises to care for me and meet my needs, so I will respond accordingly and never allow the fear of man to influence my choices.

Daniel 6:11-15

The king is trapped. He has no legal way to free Daniel from the decree he has signed into law. The other commissioners are beside themselves as their plan has worked.

Daniel 6:16-18

The king is crushed by the events of this day. It is obvious that he had great affection for Daniel as a friend. And even though **verse 18** shows he has his doubts, Daniel's life and testimony has given the king a glimmer of hope. His statement, "**Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you**" tells us a lot about both men.

First, it tells us that Daniel's faith was genuine and consistent. For the king to know that Daniel served God constantly does not leave room for just playing the part of a Christian, as so many attempt to do when in public. Your character and integrity and faith should be the same regardless of your geography or circumstances; and we have already seen this about Daniel in **verses 4-5** when the commissioners could find nothing to accuse Daniel of.

Secondly, it tells us that Darius has been influenced by Daniel's testimony. To even speak the words that Daniel's God would deliver him means he had the understanding that it was possible.

The obvious question is does your life inspire this kind of faith in those around you? Does your life draw others to the Lord or do they just see you as someone playing the part of a Christian when it's convenient? Does the mask come off when the going gets tough? Do those around you see you responding to the stresses and trials of life the same way the world responds, or do they see God and His power in you because of how differently you respond?

Daniel 6:19-20

Again, the king displays faith, but a weak faith. He is hoping against hope that somehow Daniel has survived a night of living in the lion's den.

Now the text does not indicate this, but I wonder if Daniel was tempted to delay his response.

Daniel 6:21-22

Again, notice what Daniel doesn't do. He doesn't say, "Yeah, I'm fine, king. Now get me out of here and I'll be glad to continue our conversation!" Instead, Daniel calmly answers the king's question while still looking up from the lion's den, and patiently awaits the king's order to pull Daniel out. What Daniel does do is give God the glory and basically say that anyone who remains blameless before the Lord could have survived just as he did.

Daniel 6:23

How does a person trust in God in such a situation? What they are calling a lion's den in this passage was actually a pit where captured lions were kept for the purpose of executing those who had broken certain laws or had fallen out of favor with the king. These pits were divided by a removable wall. By luring the lions to one side of the pit with some food they could then drop the wall in place and clean out the other side. The only escape was up and the pit was deep enough that nobody could jump out. So how do you trust God in an impossible situation like this?

Maybe the question should be, what does it take for you to deny your faith? What's your price? What's the high water mark for you? At what point do you pack up and vacate the premises?

Most Christians trust God about as far as they can see and hear and touch and smell and taste, which is no trust at all really. What I mean by that is most Christians trust in their senses and their intellect and their ingenuity, and call it trusting in God. But genuine trust means you don't have an answer; there is no solution in sight or in reach, and you confidently trust anyway.

The passage doesn't mention this but I think Daniel slept soundly and peacefully in the midst of those lions. It would not surprise me one bit to find out he used one for a pillow and the others surrounded him to keep him warm. I can see these lions acting like house cats, purring and rubbing up against his legs and arching their backs as he pet them.

Well, the rest of the account is important but let me just read it to you without any commentary and then make a primary application for each of us.

Daniel 6:25-28

So what lions are in your life right now? What are some impossibilities, or stresses, or trials you face? What are some heavy loads and burdens you are carrying?

I would guess that several of you are living in the lion's den right now but you are not experiencing the peace that Daniel experienced. Instead, you are stressed out watching every little move the lions in your life are making; every raising and flopping of their tails and every twitch of their whiskers.

Beloved, your God is bigger than the lions in your life and your God has promised to never leave you or forsake you. You may not understand why you are walking around in the pit right now, but does that really matter? I doubt Daniel knew why he was walking around in his pit either. But the lions aren't going to consume you just like they didn't consume Daniel. And the reason they are not going to consume you is wrapped up in who you are.

Brother George and I were visiting earlier this week and we talked a little about this.

Who are you? You might answer with your name but that name was given to you by someone else, you didn't choose it. And while the meaning of that name may describe a few of your characteristics, it isn't who you are. As a matter of fact, the Bible tells us that Jesus has a special name for you that He will reveal to you in glory, so your earthly name isn't who you are.

Some people attach what they do to who they are. "*I'm a teacher*" or "*I'm a salesman.*" But your occupation isn't who you are either.

Still others attach their accomplishments, or lack thereof, to who they are. Maybe you have been told you're a failure or that you will never amount to anything, or that you could never accomplish your dreams. But that isn't who you are either.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Romans** as we close this evening.

Romans 8:16-17; 31-39

Beloved, you are a child of the King! You are the heir of an incalculable fortune! You are a person of such value in the eyes of God that He told Jesus to go down to earth and die in your place! You were not only created in the image of God, you belong to God and God belongs to you! God owns everything and He doesn't need anything yet He reached down and chose you to be His child! You are part of the chosen race, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the people for God's own possession, and all that God owns belongs to you as a the rightful heir every child is!

So why are allowing a few itty bitty lions to ruin your day? And don't get me wrong, it is not my intention to minimize the trials and troubles you face. It is my intention to help you put them in perspective though.

Daniel had such a peace about God's love and care for him that he wasn't even in a hurry to get out of the lion's den. I don't know if you want to go so far as to telling the Lord to take His sweet time in lifting you from your pit, but if you have the right perspective and you have the right understanding and you know who you are in the Lord, what does it matter? You could live in that lion's den from now until the Lord returns and it is still just a little blip on the radar of eternity. And those lions will starve to death before they ever harm you.

Because you are a child of the King!

Let's pray.

I passed out some green index cards before the sermon. A year or two ago I passed these out and had you write down your impossibilities you would pray about. Some of you did this and many of you have reported back to me as impossible items have been checked off your list. Tonight, I want you to label the card, "Lions in My Life." I want you jot down a few that come to your mind.

Let me read to you **1 Peter 5:6-11**.

As the music plays, if you have any lions that have stolen your peace and your joy, step out right now, come forward and raise that card to the Cross and relinquish that care right now. Let God shut the mouths of the lions in your life.