

It's easy to think of reasons why Daniel might have disobeyed. He could have simply closed the windows and his enemies wouldn't have seen him pray. Or he could have said, "I'll pray quietly in my heart, and no one will know." After all, he was being forced to do this against his will. And it was only for 30 days. He might have reasoned that by going along with the law, he could use his influence to help others. Certainly he must have known that if he didn't go along with the law, the lions would eat him alive. But none of those excuses were needed, because long ago Daniel had made up his mind to serve God no matter what. It was an easy decision for Daniel: he just kept on doing what he had been doing all along.

One writer remarked that Daniel's bedroom was the real lion's den. That's where the battle was fought and won. By committing himself to continuing in prayer, he won the only battle that mattered. When he won there, the real lions were no problem. We think the miracle was that Daniel survived a night with the lions (which is a miracle, to be sure!) but the greater miracle was that Daniel continued to pray when his life was on the line. What do you do when they call for the lions? You don't change a thing. Keep on serving the Lord, keep on doing right, keep on living for Christ, and then let the chips fall where they may.

Darius finally realized the trick. He likes Daniel and seeks loopholes to prevent him being thrown to the lions. But even the king could not repeal his own law because that would make him look weak and ineffective. So, the law stood and Daniel went to the lion's den; but Darius was rooting for Daniel. The king wishes Daniel well with these words, *May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!* (6:16).

So Daniel is thrown into the lion's den, a pit dug into the ground with an entrance from the side for the lions and a huge boulder over the top so there could be no escape. It was a crude and very effective form of capital punishment. No one ever got out alive. Daniel was as good as dead the moment they threw him in. Or so the ministers thought.

Evidently Daniel was not afraid to die. He may have suspected that God would rescue him, but he could not be sure until the moment came. No doubt Daniel had some anxiety when they took him to the pit. I'm sure he was praying as they flung him into the darkness. He could hear the sound of the lions breathing a few feet away, but there were no roars, no menacing movements, no teeth tearing into his flesh. As the seconds ticked away, he began to relax. Minutes passed and then hours and the lions did not touch him. Daniel later said that an angel came to rescue him. Daniel credited God with his salvation.

It's true that God didn't prevent Daniel from being thrown in the lion's den; but it's also true that the Lord went in with Daniel. That's why, when morning came, Daniel was alive, unharmed in any way. When they pulled him out, he had no wounds. God shut the mouths of the lions so they could not harm God's servant. How frustrating for the lions to see a large meal and be unable to eat it. We usually say that Daniel was in the lion's den, but it turns out the lions were in Daniel's Den!

Back to Darius for a moment. The king slept poorly that night. When he came rushing to check on things early in the morning, he cried out, *Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?* (6:26). The pagan ruler is cheering for Daniel's God to come through. He recognized the genuineness of Daniel's faith and though he did not believe himself, he hoped that Daniel's God would deliver him.

Verse 23 tells us why the miracle happened. *[Daniel] trusted in his God.* Nothing fancy there. For over 80 years Daniel's faith had rested in the God of Israel. That wasn't about to change now. Daniel simply kept on trusting in God, and as a result, the lions couldn't touch him. Daniel's faith believed God, even when that belief was unbelievable.

The end of the story comes quickly. First, the enemies who plotted against Daniel are thrown to the lions, along with their wives and children (verse 24). Then Darius offers public praise to "the God of Daniel" (verses 26-27), the living God who endures forever. God rescues and God saves, and God is the One who delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. What amazing words coming from the lips of a pagan king. Or perhaps he is a pagan no more. Perhaps Darius became a believer in the one, true God.

Daniel 6 teaches modern-day disciples how to tame the lions of the world. *It is possible to live a pure life in the midst of a thoroughly pagan world.* Daniel's story demonstrates that if you make up your mind (or "purpose in your heart") to serve God, you can live faithfully anywhere: on the job, in your office, in a classroom, in your home, at the market, or in your neighborhood. There is always a way to compromise for those who want to negotiate with the world; but there is also always a way to obey God for those who want to remain faithful.

Christians who live for God should expect opposition. Daniel had his share of opposition and he lived a blameless life. If you set out to live for the Lord, sooner or later trouble will come your way. This is part of what Jesus meant when he spoke about "taking up your cross daily" and following him. The jealous ones are never far away. Ironically, the more honest you are, the sooner they will attack. But when opposition comes, as it did for Daniel, remember that God walks into the lion's den with you. You are never alone.

God can use us to touch unlikely people when we are faithful to God. Daniel's personal integrity had a powerful effect on Darius. When his colleagues envied him and plotted to kill him, Daniel was able to make a huge impact for good on the mightiest man in the world. His example still inspires us today; the life of a faithful servant of God is a tremendous witness to the power and love of our God.

We never know who is watching us. For every adversary out there planning our downfall, there is a Darius keeping an eye on us, hoping that our faith may prove to be genuine. They are cheering for us because they hope that what we believe will turn out to be true. So be faithful about how you live your life: your example may be leading someone to know God better.

God is able to deliver God's people from any danger they face. If God can deliver Daniel from the lion's den, God can surely deliver you. Generations of Christians have taken strength from this story because in the end, the hero isn't Daniel, it's God. That same God is sovereign over those who plot against you and sovereign over the lions who surround you. Take heart and trust in God, for God deliver you from whatever is troubling you this very moment.

Daniel gives us a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ who, though he was innocent, was envied and hated and condemned to die. Jesus, too, was let down into a pit of death and a stone was rolled across the entrance and an official seal placed across the stone. Just as God sent an angel to Daniel, God also sent angels to testify "Jesus is not here. Jesus is risen just as he said." From that pit of death came forth the Lord of life. Jesus is the One who has conquered sin and death for ever and ever.

There is much to encourage us in this story. One day we will all face hostility in some form because of our Christian faith. Those who serve the Lord never have an easy road in this world, but they never walk alone. So, be of good cheer! If we are faithful, God can use us to touch the lives of others, including those who watch from a distance and cheer us on, hoping that our God will deliver us. And God can and will deliver us if it serves God's purpose. Be faithful to God who is faithful to you.

Let us pray: Lord, I do not ask for an easy road but for courage to walk the path you set before me. I thank you that my life is in your hands and that I have nothing to fear because all my days are appointed by you. Give me the faith of Daniel. May my colors be clear so that everyone will know that I belong to you. I do not pray for a den of lions but I ask for courage to go there if that be your will for me. Above all else, may you be glorified in my life so that others will see Jesus in me. I pray this in the name of him who is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Amen.

How to Tame Lions

Sunday, February 15, 2015

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Daniel 6:19-28

As this chapter opens Daniel is second in command over the entire kingdom. King Darius likes and admires Daniel, but the king's ministers are jealous. They try to find something corrupt about Daniel, but they fail. Daniel had no obvious moral weaknesses: He lived so consciously in God's presence that he was a man "above reproach." In desperation they said, *We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God* (6:4-5).

In this, they discover Daniel only "flaw." He was utterly predictable in his daily prayers. He prayed every day at the same time in the same way, and his enemies soon realized this was where they could catch him. The ministers proposed a law that would prevent praying to anyone except the king for 30 days. Basically they wanted to make Darius God for a month. This appealed to the king's pride, so Darius signed the law. The king had no idea that Daniel was the intended target.

The ministers knew Daniel would break this law; they knew Daniel would keep on praying just as he had always done. Daniel was a victim of his own integrity. He was predictably faithful to God. Ironically, Daniel's troubles came not from his weakness, but from his strength. And Daniel did not disappoint them. *Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before* (6:10). Daniel continued to pray, "just as he had done before." He did it knowing that his adversaries would catch him.