

# **“Delivered From The Lions”**

Daniel 6  
August 26, 2007

Today, we come to the end of the historical narrative in Daniel. Each chapter has related a different – though sometimes similar – encounter between God’s sovereignty and worldly power. In Chapter 1, God gave Jerusalem into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel and his friends asked for permission to eat only specific foods; they did so to worship the true God, and were found to be the healthiest and most insightful in the King’s enculturation program.

In Chapter 2, the king had a dream for which only God in heaven could provide interpretation.

In Chapter 3, three boys refused to worship an idol and were thrown into the raging fire – and survived. Remember, they said, “If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.” God was able to save; despite the efforts of the most powerful human to have them consumed by fire.

In Chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar had a second dream in which his refusal to recognize the sovereignty of God led to an extended period of exile and insanity. “When he refused to repent, the judgment was rendered, “until you have learned that the Most High has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals and gives it to whom he will.” The king repents and is restored.

Unlike Chapter 4, in Chapter 5, years later, the new King in Babylon is reckless in his disregard of the living God, holds a banquet while the Persian army is camped outside of the walls of Babylon, and sees the writing on the wall. God demonstrates that “Most High has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals and gives it to whom he will.” Belshazzar is killed that very night.

The course of these accounts cover about sixty years. Daniel, who would have been a teen or in his early twenties at the time he was taken into exile from Jerusalem, was almost eighty years old when Darius the Mede took control of the city of Babylon.

## **Daniel 6**

### **The World Forgets and Rebels Against God**

This is the third king who struggles with the sovereignty of God from their position of power. Normally, we look at this as the “absolute power corrupts absolutely” kind of thing. That is true; however, it also is true that it shows that security in anything but the Lord makes us susceptible to temptation. More on that later.

Once again, we are presented with the issue of worldly powers versus the sovereignty of God. Sixty years – that’s right – sixty years! Daniel has been in exile, he has been faithful to his God, and even so, the trials still come.

For Christians, this means that suffering is a part of the Christian walk. Sometimes we read the gospels, we read stories like Daniel, and we come away with the sense that everything turns out fine. Does Daniel survive the lion’s den; yes. However, it is worth pointing out that Daniel was thrown *into* the lion’s den.

Being a Christian is not safe. The world will not leave you alone and just let you believe what you want to believe. The walk of a disciple includes experiencing pain and alienation, the loneliness of being different, and the cost of choices that the world does not understand.

Marva Dawn, in a book entitled “Talking the Walk” about recovering the language of Christianity, says this,

...Jesus did not suffer only under Pontius Pilate or merely when He died. Jesus’ birth involved the sufferings of poverty, of scandal, of a smelly manger and scratchy hay. Jesus suffered as a refugee from Herod, as a teacher misunderstood by both His family and His closest disciples, as a homeless traveling rabbi constantly worn out by pushy crowds and harassing religious leaders. (p. 144)

In the conflict between the sovereignty of God and the powers of this world, the consequences of choosing God will result in personal suffering. Daniel’s decision to be faithful to God in circumstances where it would have been easy to avoid confrontation – how long is 30 days, anyway – shows that the world does not simply let God’s people be.

Daniel did not seek this confrontation but Daniel did not flinch. Perhaps it was because of a lifetime spent in prayer. Perhaps it was in remembrance of the Lord’s deliverance of his friends years ago. Perhaps it did not even register with him to obey the king’s order – recognizing it for what it was.

Nonetheless, Daniel was aware that not obeying the king’s command would result in worldly consequences. American Christians are often lulled into a sense of complacency because we have food, we have shelter, and we have clothing. We have freedom to worship – I suspect no one here was afraid of being arrested this morning for coming to church.

Yet Daniel is not all that different than us. Look again at Daniel’s life. He was brought into exile, but thrived in that situation. In the early days, there were some dangerous times; for the most part, Daniel seems to have had a decent existence under Nebuchadnezzar and even under Belshazzar. His worldly circumstances were comfortable. His faithfulness to God still took priority. Consider how Scripture describes Daniel’s relationship with God (verse 10), “Although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open toward

Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him, just as he had done previously.”

In good circumstances and bad circumstances, Daniel praised God. It was precisely this aspect of Daniel’s character that led to the worldly plot against him. They knew he would be faithful, so they just had to set him up.

### **The Sovereign God is able to deliver us from the lions.**

Daniel’s situation was dire. That is, his human situation was dire. Daniel hardly seemed fazed; perhaps because he has seen this before. You can almost hear Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego’s response to the king ringing in Daniel’s ears.

Whether fire or hungry lions, God was able to deliver the boys from things that look scary to us. The boys – Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – all seem to have confidence in God regardless of their circumstances. I know I have been making this point and I will risk overstressing it: God is sovereign over everything. The boys make no promises about *how* God will deliver them from their trials, they simply trust that the outcome will glorify God. In the New Testament, Paul will say it this way, “It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.” (Philippians 1:20-21).

Do you trust God with you life? The quick way to check is to consider the things that make you anxious; and ask yourself whether you are willing to trust God with those things. Your health, your finances, your relationships; ask yourself whether you are willing to trust God with those or do you try to control them by yourself. Is your God able to deliver you from the lions in your life?

The God revealed in Scripture is able; is He your Lord?

### **The Sovereign God is able to deliver us from our own sins.**

Here’s something I did not contemplate until I was preparing for this sermon. This story is called Daniel and the Lion’s Den, but it is only partly accurate. The real story is about another character: King Darius.

Scripture does not give Daniel a lot of emotional range within this story. He does what he does, he accepts what happens to him, does not complain to the king about how unfair it is, and does not seem altogether surprised about the outcome.

Darius, on the other hand, realizes that he has done something wrong and there is nothing he can do to change it. He has fallen victim to temptation, he has listened to flatterers, he has presumed power that he does not have.

Note how Darius reacts when he realizes what he has done and what are the consequences. Scripture says, “he was distressed.” Distressed. Anguish. Shock. Horror. He looks to try to figure a way to save Daniel from the consequence of *his – the king’s* – sin. “He was determined to save Daniel.” Even though he was the most powerful man on earth; Darius could not save Daniel. “Until the sun went down, he made every effort to rescue him.”

Do you see where Scripture is leading with this?

Has anyone here ever succumbed to temptation and done something you wish you had not? Have you ever said something, and as soon as the words were out of your mouth, you wished you could get them back? Have you ever seen the look of pain on the face of someone you love when you have hurt them? Have you ever turned your back and hoped that no one would notice what you did because you were so ashamed?

Those times are distressing. We are anguished. We are shocked and ashamed of ourselves. For some, it is so distressing that they believe God could not love them. Maybe you know someone for whom this is true, maybe it is true for you.

We are distressed when we finally realize the consequences of our sins. We try to find ways to avoid those consequence. We try to figure out a way to rationalize that what we did was not that bad. Oh, that may be a salve for a moment, but it does not hold up under scrutiny and it does not last. We can give voice to the distress, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” “Oh, God, I am so sorry.” When someone else hurts because of what we have done, even those words feel empty to us. Words are not enough. So we move on, “What can I do? How can I make this better?” We want to do something, we are willing to pay anything, we want to make it better. Like Darius, we find ourselves in desperation because there is nothing we can do. We made the mess, but we cannot clean it up.

Darius probably wanted Daniel to be mad at him. At least then he could feel bad for himself because Daniel would have been rightfully angry. Or, Daniel could have said, “I’m so disappointed in you, King.” Oh, how that would pierce his heart, but the healing could begin. Instead, Scripture is absolutely silent about Daniel’s demeanor as he is thrown into the lion’s den. That may have been worst of all because it left Darius alone to contemplate his sin.

He could not work on the relationship he had destroyed.

He could not undo what he had done.

He was stuck.

So he prayed.

And so, when we are stuck, we pray. Darius lifted his prayer this way, “May your God, whom you faithfully serve, deliver you!” Then, a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den.

Clearly the lion's den meant death for Daniel. It was Daniel's tomb.

Oh, how the king grieved. He stayed up all night. He could not sleep. Do you know this experience? Have you ever stayed up grieving over something you did, over something you failed to do? He fasted. This may sound like a religious discipline; but think about it. This is more a reflection of the depth of his despair than religious devotion. He was not hungry. He did not want food. He could not think of eating when he knew what he had done and what it meant. There is a bitterness of soul that goes with grieving our sin.

When morning arrived and Darius called out to Daniel, he probably did not expect an answer. Would you? I would not have expected an answer.

Imagine, then, the range of emotions that Darius must have experienced when Daniel answers, "I'm ok!" Relief. Joy. Awe. Joy. Confusion. Joy. And perhaps even, joy. When God intervenes and the unexpected happens, we experience the power of love.

In his expression of joy, King Darius sends around a message proclaiming, "People should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: For he is the living God, enduring forever. His kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion has no end. He delivers and rescues, he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth; for he has saved Daniel" – and he could have added, "me" – "from the power of the lions."

At this point, you may see how God improved on this story a few hundred years later. 1 Peter describes the devil as hungry lion prowling around, looking for someone to devour. The wages of sin is death; the devil's desire is to draw us into death, into destruction.

Jesus did what Daniel did; only infinitely better. Daniel suffered the consequence of Darius' sin. For Jesus, it was all of us – you and me, included. We had sinned. We had done things we could not undo. We could not make it better and we could not take away the consequences. We could only watch as the faithful one, Jesus Christ, took on himself the consequences of our sins. He walked to the cross – certain death, the equivalent of the lion's den.

For Jesus, the lion's mouths were not shut. He endured the cross and he died – for you and for me. But, here's the amazing part; not the next morning, but on the third morning, the stone was rolled away and Jesus was not there. Death could not hold him. The tomb could not keep him in.

When the women went to the tomb, they wondered who would roll away the stone. They were not expecting a miracle. Would you? I would not have expected a miracle. Can you imagine the range of emotions that they experienced when the angel says, "He is not here. He is risen." Relief. Joy. Awe. Joy. Confusion. Joy. And perhaps even, joy. When God intervenes and the unexpected happens, we experience the power of love.

Our testimony is the same as Darius' proclamation, "People should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, enduring forever. His kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion has no end. He delivers and rescues, he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth; for he has saved Daniel" – and you and me – "from the power of the lions" and the power of death. "For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

### **Conclusion**

Friends, this is the good news of the gospel. We are invited to life; we are invited to a relationship with the living God. We are called to praise – not because God needs it – but because we need to remember the amazing things God has done. God is sovereign. He is able to deliver us from the power of the lions.

Will you trust him today?

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

8:45 prayer/offering

10:00 offering