

# In the lion's den

So we come to probably the most familiar part of the story of Daniel. Daniel in the lion's den. And in many ways you'll hear nothing new. Much of it we've already touched on in one way or another. But friends, don't allow familiarity to breed contempt.

*It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, <sup>2</sup> with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. <sup>3</sup> Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. <sup>4</sup> At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. (Daniel 6:1-4)*

There's been a change of king. It is now Darius. Belshazzar, son of Nebuchadnezzar, has died, and Darius is on the throne. We don't know a huge amount about Darius, but he is king of Babylon, and he is trying to reorganise his kingdom. He appoints 120 satraps to help him rule. Over those he appoints three administrators. Daniel is one of these. Soon Daniel is appointed over the whole lot of them. Why is this? Because of his exceptional qualities. This angers the other officials and they begin to plot against Daniel.

What is it that irritates them and angers them so much? When Babylon fell it was like any other empire that fell. It was in a state of chaos. It was degenerate. It was filled with a love of luxury. It was riddled with a lack of desire for hard work. There was an increasing abandonment of principles by which people lived. And there was an unrestrained increase in immorality and dishonesty..

Those in charge had only one real interest – self! How can I gain from this? The people in power were really only interested in lining their own pockets. Corruption is not easy to stop. Darius at least understood that, and what he needed was someone to handle the exchequer!

Daniel was that man. He had a proven track record of diligence, honesty and integrity. He was probably in his 80's by this time. He had long years of faithful service. He was someone the king knew he could trust.

*<sup>5</sup> Finally these men 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."*

*<sup>6</sup> So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: "May King Darius live forever! <sup>7</sup> The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den. <sup>8</sup> Now, Your Majesty, issue*

*the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”<sup>9</sup> So King Darius put the decree in writing.*

*<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. <sup>12</sup> So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: “Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions’ den?”*

*The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”*

*<sup>13</sup> Then they said to the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.” <sup>14</sup> When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.*

*<sup>15</sup> Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, “Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.”*

*<sup>16</sup> So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!”*

*<sup>17</sup> A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed. <sup>18</sup> Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep. (Daniel 6:5-18)*

Corrupt people will stop at nothing to serve their own cause, and the officials conspire against Daniel. And since there is no depth to which corrupt people will not sink, they plan to be rid of Daniel. They knew they would not find fault in his public duties. Daniel was everything he should be.

Friends, it is possible to live like that even in the real world. We see so many public figures today who are disgraced one way or another. It is possible to be everything you should be. So their plan was that Daniel was first and foremost faithful to God. Nothing would change that. So they conspired to make him choose between God and the king. They knew he would choose God. But in this way, he would fall foul of the king. Got him!

Christians today still have to choose – you have to make that choice: “You cannot serve God and man”; “Where your treasure is there will be your heart also”. You cannot serve two masters.

So they used flattery and lied. It’s an age-old formula – but it works. They say to the king: “We’ll make you God for 30 days – everyone will have to worship you.” That’s flattery. They made the king think he was more than he really was! They made him feel good. They put him on a pedestal.

Friends, beware of flattery – it is a dangerous thing. The first sin, the sin of believing flattery of the devil. You will be like God. Adam and Eve fell for it – seduced by flattery and lies. And we're still falling for it. Some of you are in danger of falling for it right now. Remember – God gives to whomever He chooses. You have nothing that isn't a great gift from God Himself – graciously given to you in great wisdom and generosity.

Be very careful of flattery. Flattery feeds the ego. And it can get you into all kind of places and situations that you don't want to be. And from which there is often no escape. That's exactly what happened to the king. He fell for the flattery and made a law that for 30 days everyone must worship him.

Daniel refuses to follow the king's decree (we'll return to this later). So the king was left with no choice but to throw him to the lions. He made a law which is now irrevocable, but he desperately wants to save Daniel. He is powerless. What kind of God is powerless? But he fell for the flattery! He's backed himself into a corner – one which he cannot get out of. Beware of the dangers of flattery.

We're not sure why Darius wants to save Daniel. Maybe he's got his own interests at heart, and Daniel is good at his job. Maybe he's afraid of what God might do! Maybe he's beginning to realise he's not God. So he has a sleepless night waiting to find out what will happen to Daniel. Haven't we heard that before... kings and sleepless nights? Maybe living well in second choice worlds is not so much about having power!

*<sup>19</sup> At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. <sup>20</sup> When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"*

*<sup>21</sup> Daniel answered, "May the king live forever! <sup>22</sup> My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty."*

*<sup>23</sup> The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.*

*<sup>24</sup> At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.*

*<sup>25</sup> Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth:*

*"May you prosper greatly!*

*<sup>26</sup> "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.*

*"For he is the living God*

*and he endures forever;*

*his kingdom will not be destroyed,*

*his dominion will never end.*

*<sup>27</sup> He rescues and he saves;*

*he performs signs and wonders*

*in the heavens and on the earth.  
He has rescued Daniel  
from the power of the lions.”*

*<sup>28</sup> So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus<sup>[a]</sup> the Persian. (Daniel 6:19-28)*

So in the morning he rushes to the lion's den. Kings don't rush, and neither do the gods! Maybe he realises his fate depends on what has happened to Daniel. Daniel's response to the king's question "are you safe?" is remarkable: "O king live forever!" What would you have said? This is the guy who's just tried to kill you, and you say "live forever"! It shows great respect and humility and an understanding that there is something bigger going on here.

Friends, the language of response is crucial. The way we make a stand is important. In chapter one we saw this again when Daniel asked not to eat the royal food. He did it with respect and integrity. We would do well to learn from Daniel. I want to draw a couple of insights from this part of Daniel's life.

### Faithfulness Matters to God

First is that faithfulness matters. And living well in second choice world. If you want to live life to the full, faithfulness matters. And you know there are now shortcuts to faithfulness. How often have you heard, or thought, well it's not a big sin. I could do a lot worse – I know plenty of people who do! There is no hierarchy of sin in God's economy. Sin is sin is sin is sin. Faithfulness requires us to put God first in everything. You can't be faithful in some things and not in others. What areas of your life are you struggling in faithfulness?

There are obvious parallels between chapter three in the furnace and chapter six in the lion's den. In chapter three, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego end up in the furnace. In chapter six, Daniel ends up in the lion's den. But there's one significant difference. And it is in the way they were faithful. In chapter three, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to go along with what everybody else was doing. They refused to join in when the music played and bow down to a false god. In chapter six Daniel refused to stop doing what he had always done. To pray three times a day at his window facing Jerusalem.

Both refused to bow to idols. And friends, we will at different times need both approaches to remain faithful. Some Christians believe we must be anti-cultural to make a stand. To go against the culture. To stand against it. And there may be times when we do need to protest.

But I suggest we are to be counter-cultural – not anti-cultural. Daniel lived in the real world and so do we. To be counter to the culture is to show a different way of living – the divine alternative. To be distinctive within the culture.

How do we do that? To love. Isn't that what marks you and I as Christian?

When Daniel heard the decree, he went home and prayed, just like he'd always done. I suggest it would have been easy for him to hide and pray. But he was faithful

to spiritual priorities. Why was he so able to carry on like that under great pressure? Because that's what he'd always done. He'd learnt the habit of faithfulness.

When I learnt to drive my instructor used to say this: how you drive in the dry is how you'll drive in the wet. What did she mean? She meant that if I was going to drive safely in the wet – the more dangerous weather – I would have to get into the habit in the good weather. Many of us think, well when it's bad weather I'll drive differently. I'll be more careful. The truth is, you drive in the wet as you drive in the dry.

Friends, you can't turn on faithfulness. When the pressure is on, what's really going on will show. When the pressure was on, Daniel didn't change his priorities. He was faithful when no-one was watching. How about you? Who are you when no-one is looking? When the lions come looking to devour – how you act will be determined by how you are now – the habits you are developing now.

Friends, there are lions waiting to devour you constantly. "Your enemy the devil prowls around you looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith." (1 Peter 5:8-9)

That's why faithfulness matters. And your ability to resist will depend on habits of faithfulness cultivated in good times.

- There are lions within. Some of you are struggling with that now – they want to devour your soul.
- The lions that assault you, physically. Some of you are struggling with health.
- The lions of your social environment, enticing you away from faithfulness.
- The lions in the workplace. Making worldly demands.

The devil will do all he can to stop you being faithful. Ever wondered how?

*Addressing a worldwide convention of demons, Satan told them: "So long as Christians stay close to God, we've no power over them. So here is what I want you to do:*

- *Keep them busy with non-essentials.*
- *Tempt them to overspend and get into debt.*
- *Make them work long hours to maintain empty lifestyles.*
- *Overstimulate their minds with television and computers so they can't hear God speaking to them.*
- *Make them self-sufficient. Keep them so busy working in their own strength that they never experience God's power working through them.*

*I promise... it will work!*

Faithfulness matters, if you want to live well in a send choice world.

### People matter to God

The second insight is that people matter to God. For Daniel, serving God and being faithful did not mean escape from the lions. That may very well be true for us also friends. It is true that serving God will bring adversity and suffering.

Sometimes God miraculously delivers us from our suffering – the mouth of the lions. Daniel was again promoted as a result of being in the lion's den. But we have no right to be delivered. There is no guarantee. Sometimes adversity and suffering serves to advance the kingdom in ways that would otherwise not be possible. Take what happened to Stephen in Acts 8. Stephen was stoned to death for not stopping preaching. After his death, the Christians were scattered into Judea and Samaria, as great persecution broke out. God had commanded the church to go to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria with the gospel. But it had got stuck in Jerusalem. Not anymore! The scattered Christians fleeing persecution took the church where it was supposed to go. Adversity afforded an opportunity that might not otherwise have been possible.

But the key in all this is that neither Daniel, nor Stephen, nor any Christian, is left alone. Daniel was visited by an angel. Stephen had a vision of Christ Himself. People matter to God far too much that He would ever leave you on your own. You are far too precious for Him to abandon you – whatever the circumstances.

Isaiah 43 says: "When you go through the waters I will be with you, and when you pass through the rivers they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire you will not be burned, the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God. You are precious and honoured in my sight and I love you. Do not be afraid, for I am with you."

He loves you because He loves you because He loves you. He has bestowed gifts and blessings on you which you really don't deserve! And He is not going to give up on you. He will not leave you alone. You are far too precious for that.

Daniel lived the whole of his adult life in a second choice world. I wonder what he thought when he looked back. Maybe he thought he spent his life in a place he did not want to be. But maybe too he recognised that God was powerfully with him – even in the most extraordinary of places. And maybe, just maybe he thought – and on balance – I wouldn't have missed it for the comfortable life of Jerusalem!

Friends, second choice worlds aren't where we'd choose to be. But maybe, just maybe they are the places where God can be most powerfully present. And where we're able to experience some great adventures in faith.