IN THE LIONS’ DEN

Daniel 6:1-28
Key Verse 6:22

“My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They did not harm me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king.”

Last week, we studied the story of king Belshazzar and the writing on the wall. We could learn that even though God’s grace to us is abundant and overflowing, sinful human beings reject God’s grace by proudly refusing to learn from the spiritual struggles of others. Those who cannot learn from the struggles of others cannot listen to God's word. The writing on the wall is for them. But those who humble themselves enough to learn from the spiritual examples God has given us can grow as men and women of truth. Like Daniel, they can be shepherds for their nation and for the whole world. In this week’s passage, Daniel begins a new life as a servant to Darius, king of the Medes and the Persians. Daniel was more than 80 years old. His time of training should have been long past. But God was not sorry to train Daniel at the age of 80. May God help us to grow in courage and faith like that of Daniel to receive training from God all our lifetime.

I. Daniel prayed (1-13)

First, A new administration (1-5). The Babylonian empire came to a sudden end when Belshazzar fell to the invading Medes and Persians. The empire had become so corrupt that many of the peoples and even the wise men and magicians of Babylon looked to the new rulers as liberators. The Medes and Persians therefore, took over the Babylonian empire largely intact and without much disruption of the peoples' daily lives. Many of the rulers and officials from Babylon were hired to do the same job for king Darius. He was concerned with corruption, however, and appointed three administrators as overseers of the satraps and other rulers Darius had set over the land. One of these three was Daniel. Daniel had served king Nebuchadnezzar faithfully for 40 years, but was gradually forgotten by the Babylonian
kings until the night of Belshazzar's fall. On that very night, Daniel's career was resurrected, first by Belshazzar, and then by Darius, who made Daniel one of three administrators over the entire kingdom, at the age of at least 80.

In spite of Daniel's advanced age, however, Daniel was exceptional in carrying out his duties as royal administrator. Look at verse 3. “Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.” A new kingdom meant new opportunities for ambitious young men to make a name for themselves. There were many among Darius' administrators who sought to catch his attention and gain promotion for themselves through their loyalty and hard work. But none of these ambitious young men could beat out Daniel, though he did not seek to draw attention to himself in the least. As he had been in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, so he was now a man of integrity, courage and faith. Now, it seemed that Daniel was ready to reach the very pinnacle of human achievement as the second in command to king Darius.

Daniel's promotion, however, was not viewed favorably by the other administrators in Darius' kingdom. Look at verse 4. “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.” When Darius wanted to exalt Daniel, many jealous coworkers sought to bring Daniel down by smearing his name.

There is a saying, “If you beat a rug, dust will come out of it.” The men who investigated Daniel were sure that they could find some sort of embarrassing or incriminating behavior on his part over his long career. They found none. Everything they looked into testified on Daniel's behalf that he was a man of integrity, trustworthiness and character. He was neither corrupt nor negligent in all that he did. It was an amazing and disturbing find. These men had to repent before the spotless record of Daniel, and learn from his zealous and thorough spirit. But they didn’t want to repent. They wanted to get rid of Daniel,
who made them look bad. Finally, they found a way they could trap Daniel. Look at verse 5. “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.’” It is true that corrupt men cannot stand in the presence of purity. Titus 2:15a says, “To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure.” We must not be the ones who seek to smear and condemn those who are better than us, to justify ourselves. In this unbelieving generation, may God help us to honor others and learn from what is pure and right.

Second, A vain king (6-9). The administrators knew that Daniel was a faithful man of prayer. So they formulated a plan that would either crush his piety or destroy him altogether. Look at verses 6-9. “So the administrators and the satraps went as a group to the king and said: ‘O king Darius, live forever! 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 man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lion’s den. Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be repealed.’ So King Darius put the decree in writing.” King Darius was not the megalomaniac that Nebuchadnezzar had been. But Darius was still a fallen man. In his vanity, he was blind to see the real motive of his servants. He agreed to their request, and made it immutable law that all men should pray only to him in the next thirty days. Self-glory seeking seems to be our human right. Self-glory seeking, however, leads all men into the trap of the devil, sooner or later.

Third, Daniel’s prayer (10-13). Look at verse 10. “Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the window 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.” Daniel had been outmaneuvered, politically. But Daniel did not try to fight back, nor did he run away. He went home as he usually did, and got down on his knees and prayed, facing Jerusalem, three times a day. His prayer was not one of fear,
anxiety or dread. He gave thanks to his God, just as he had done before. He looked toward Jerusalem, not because of his nationalism, but because he remembered the promise of God, given to his ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Daniel bowed his head before the Creator God and gave thanks for everything, not knowing what would happen to him. There are many things to be amazed at regarding Daniel's prayer. But this one thing is perhaps the most amazing: Daniel, at the age of 80 or more, thanked God who permitted him to receive such persecution and training, even after so many years of hard spiritual struggling in service to Nebuchadnezzar. Even after so many years, Daniel did not see himself as anything but God's humble servant. He bowed down before his Sovereign God, and acknowledged that God is good, and God is righteous and God is holy in all that he does. And he trusted in his God that whatever happened, it would be for the good. Many people can look back at times of training or hardship and say, “you know, that was actually for the good.” But not many people know how to thank God during training. Rather, they know many curse words with which they express their bitterness and despair. But Daniel prayed with the peace of God in the midst of God's hard training, just as he had done before. He prayed because he was helpless. He did not think that he was helpless, however, because he had the power of prayer. We are helpless to live by faith in an evil world. But we can overcome the world when we faithfully pray, trusting in God.

Look at verses 11-12a. “Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. 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 man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions’ den?’” The administrators went as a group to the king to denounce Daniel. They used their number to give weight to the charges they were making. Darius acknowledged that his decree still stood. Then they pressed their charge. “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day” (13). Daniel’s prayer was a testimony to his faith in God. Now, his prayer seemed to be the very thing that would condemn him to death.
II. “He shut the mouths of the lions” (14-28)

First, A helpless king (14-18). King Darius had issued a decree that all men everywhere should pray only to him. Now, he discovered, it was a trap to get him to do the one thing he really didn’t want to do. He was determined to rescue Daniel, and he made every effort to do so until sundown. It was to no avail. At the end of the day, the administrators came to him as a group and said, “Remember, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict the king issues can be changed” (15b). King Darius had enjoyed for a time the thought that he was worthy of all men’s prayers and praise. But he was exposed through the scheming of his administrators. He was a helpless man before the evil of the world.

So the king gave the order, and Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!” Here we see that king Darius knew about Daniel's faithfulness and service to God. He was not ignorant at all when he issued the decree. He was wrong, and now he knew it. What could he do? If he could not save Daniel, who could? Darius recognized that God was Daniel's only hope. In truth, he recognized that God was his only hope to save him from the foolish act he had made under the influence of his sinful nature. Darius was praying for Daniel. Darius was praying for himself, that he might be forgiven by God and that the wrong he had committed might be undone. A stone was placed over the mouth of the den, and sealed by the king's ring. Then Darius went home that night. He couldn’t eat. He couldn’t enjoy any entertainment. He couldn’t sleep. In short, Darius repented before God. No one likes to be helpless. But helplessness is the beginning point of true repentance.

Second, God rescued him (19-23). Of course, the truly helpless one in this situation was Daniel, who spent the night in the lions' den. At the first light of dawn, Darius got up, put on his robes and ran to the den. As he came near, 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?” How could Daniel be saved from such a situation? Darius had to give up hope. But Darius decided
to hope in the living God. Then he heard Daniel’s voice ring out, “O king, live forever!” It was the voice of God to Darius, convincing him that God is living, and he is able to rescue those who serve him.

Then Daniel gave his testimony. “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, O king.” Lions are cruel, vicious and marauding animals. But the lions did not touch or harm Daniel at all. It was because Daniel had struggled before God to do what was right. Now, God clothed Daniel in the image of God through his holy angel, so that the lions’ den became like the original Garden of Eden, where men had the authority of God over all the animals. The lions bowed down to Daniel in respect, because the Creator God was with him through his angel.

From time to time, we face terrible trials and cruel injustice, because we live in this fallen world. Especially, we suffer because we live with ungodly men who have no respect for what is right, but will do anything to promote themselves or get something from others. We sense that we are falling into a lions’ den, filled with ravenous lions waiting to tear us to pieces. This is especially true for those who earnestly seek God. King David was just a shepherd boy. But God anointed him through Samuel to become king of a united Israel, even though Saul was already king. David had enough hard times because of Saul’s jealousy. So David felt that he was being mocked and crucified by his foes, and that his life was hanging by a thread. So David cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps 22:1). Indeed David tasted the sufferings of Jesus in his battle to fulfill God’s will for his life. What could be David’s strength and hope in this time of trial? Psalm 22:3 says, “Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.” David found absolute hope in the time of trials, because he knew that God was enthroned and ruling over the nations. So David humbly received training from God all his lifetime. Then God could lift him up and make him a blessing for his generation, as well as the source of blessing for all nations through the promise to send the Messiah, Jesus Christ, through him.
Daniel was more than 80 years old. He had to give up struggling to please God. But he did not give up. He trusted in his God, and God gave him the victory. He was faithful to carry out his mission, and so God used him as a shepherd and father for the kings of the world. We are terrified of the lions and tigers of this world. But we do not need to fear them at all. We must fear God alone, who is the sovereign ruler of this world, and live to please him. Then God will shut the mouths of the lions in his right time, and his servants and his name will be exalted. We mourn for the Korean businessman who was executed in Iraq by cruel lions. We mourn for the Iraqi families who have suffered enough because of the tyranny of terror. We pray for the American servicemen to repent and believe that God is sovereign over all nations, including our own, and that we must answer to him. But we are not afraid to serve God in this generation, because he is enthroned, high and mighty, and all things are working toward his good purpose. Praise and thanks be to God!

Third, King Darius sees the light (24-28). Darius had Daniel lifted out of the lions’ den. He was unharmed. Then he ordered the men who had tricked him to be thrown into the den, along with their families. The lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. Then Darius confessed his personal faith in the living God, who answered his prayer and rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.

May God help us in the gathering storm to look up to God, and know that God is able to save those who serve him. May God help us to clothe ourselves in his righteousness by earnestly seeking him in prayer and Bible study. May God make America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.