

“DANIEL IN THE LIONS’ DEN.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Daniel 6:14-28

The Law of the Medes and Persians. Vss. 14-18.

Some of the politicians of the new Persian government conspired to get rid of Daniel. So they wrote a law making it illegal for 30 days to pray to any god without going through King Darius. The king naively signed it into law and Daniel didn’t even blink. As he had always done, he got down on his knees in an open window facing Jerusalem and prayed three times a day.

The next scene is shameful. Here are the best Persia has to offer, the officials, the leaders, the respected members of society, sneaking around Daniel’s house, coming to hunt down an old man, a foreigner, on his knees offering prayer to his God.

They don’t expose Daniel right away, they made sure to spring the trap first. They got Darius’ commitment to law and order first.

One of the characteristics of the laws of the Medes and Persians was that once made they could not be revoked. No one had power to reverse them. No appeals, no petitions, no exceptions. It made justice much less complicated, if sometimes unfair.

Then they played the last card. It’s that Jewish exile. It’s a racial slur. He’s not one of us, he doesn’t belong here. Not only that but his defiance was not just a slip up or occasional, it was persistent, repeated. Worse he is a subversive, “he pays no attention to you.” He is a hostile element, his religion, his ways are contrary to ours, against our kingdom. He is acting against our laws and against our law-giver.

As our government grows increasingly secular, Christianity will be seen as subversive because it is against the state, against the laws of the land. Satan can just as easily use law and order as a weapon as he can lawlessness. He is as comfortable in legislative chambers as he is in dens of iniquity. The Pharisees and Sadducees used the law for their injustice against Jesus.

John 19:7 The Jews answered [Pilate], “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.”

Psalm 146:3 Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

Those most zealous of justice were seeking a great injustice. They were using the system and the law to their own selfish and evil benefit. In the end the stability and health of a society depends as much on the hearts of the people as the laws of the land.

The key to a stable government and healthy society is having good laws that are firmly upheld and enforced impartially, fairly, consistently.

Daniel was accused and convicted and sentenced to be executed. The king was trapped. The king spent the rest of the day trying to find a way around the law. He brought in all his lawyers, all the constitutional experts on the laws of the Medes and the Persians. He looked for angles or loopholes. Maybe he even pled with the accusers.

Even when rulers are not openly hostile to you or out to get you or hurt you, don't put your hope and trust in them. Don't put them above God. They will fail you, they will let you down, they will make terrible choices, and the wrong decisions.

King Darius says as much when he says to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve, deliver you!"

Put no hope or faith or trust in kings and presidents. If you think our next president is going to do you good and no harm, you are foolish and naïve, and you haven't been paying attention to history. In God alone do we trust.

Notice the contrast between the king's anxiety and Daniel's tranquility. Daniel was in a den full of lions and he had a better night than the king did. Such is the heart of a man of prayer who trusts God, and is at perfect peace. There was fear outside of the den and peace in it.

True peace doesn't come from what you have, from your possessions or accomplishments. True peace comes from the presence and favor of the Lord. Fear God and all will be well with your soul. The presence of God is better than the luxuries of the royal palace.

Psalm 84:10 For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Intervention, Daniel's deliverance, vss. 19-23.

Better to be a man of faith in a lion's den than a faithless man in a palace. But the king had some faith, otherwise he wouldn't have bothered go to the lion's den in the morning. Who would have faith to hope Daniel was still alive? Never before had any man come out of that den alive.

At first light he went with haste to the lions' den and cried out in anguish, asking the question to end all questions, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"

Has your God saved you?

What a great question? What a great testimony to the kind of witness Daniel had, a man who lived in a way that made people around him ask good questions.

Daniel speaks for the only time in this entire chapter.

Daniel 6:21-22 “O king, live forever! 22 My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.”

This story shows us how God can deal with the powers of darkness, how God can and will conquer all His enemies and ours. God is shown to be sovereign over the animal kingdom, even the lions, the king of the beasts, obey God.

Hour after hour Daniel sat there in that dark den experiencing the incredible power and grace of God. Did he sleep? Maybe. Did he cuddle up with those big cats? Or did he have the most incredible conversation with the angel of the Lord, maybe Jesus Himself?

Daniel 6:23 ... no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

What do we have to fear? Why do we fear death? It can't touch us until God's purposes for us on earth are done, and then death is only His servant to deliver us to eternal life. If God is for us what on earth can be against us?

Many commentators see in this story a *foreshadowing of the resurrection*. This event is a small glimpse of an even greater conspiracy against another innocent person declared guilty and sentenced to death.

Matthew 26:59-61 Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, 60 but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward 61 and said, “This man said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.’”

The tomb was sealed by Christ's enemies, he was innocent, an angel came. Their efforts to seal the tomb and prevent the resurrection were just as in vain.

Retribution, Daniel's enemies destroyed, vs. 24.

Daniel is vindicated and his enemies are liquidated. Those who use evil for their own selfish purposes will find that evil coming back on themselves.

Ancient Near East custom was anyone who made a false charge received the same fate their intended victim would have received. We find this in OT law:

Deuteronomy 19:16, 19 If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, ... and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, 19 then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother.

Killing the families was also part of Persian custom, such are the horrors of ancient justice. One possible explanation was to prevent any retaliation from family members.

There is a dark side to God's justice and judgment. God will bring destruction on all His enemies. Any evidence of that in our lifetime should be received as a warning of what greater destruction is to come.

Notice their gods were powerless to deliver them. He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (I John 4:4).

Proclamation, Darius' new decree, vss. 25-28.

This is the high point of the whole chapter. We missed this in chapter 5, but had it at the end of 2, 3, and 4. Like Nebuchadnezzar, Darius acknowledges the truth about the true God. Darius' new decree is a proclamation of praise to the God of Daniel.

Daniel 6:26-27 for he is the living God, enduring forever;
his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end.
27 He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders
in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.

When the king was addressed they said, "O King, live forever." Now he confesses who actually lives forever.

Darius proclaims God is the living God as opposed to his dead idols.
God is the enduring God who keeps His promises
His kingdom is indestructible, it will never end, unlike all the earthly kingdoms.
God's kingdom cannot be shaken.
Daniel's God is the saving God.

We who know this to be true should find it to be cause for much worship. This is a foretaste of what is to come:

Philippians 2:9-10 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Prospering in exile, vs. 28.

Daniel spent his entire life in exile, in the proverbial lion's den. God preserved and protected him under every successive king, under every change of government, enabling him to even prosper in his situation.

But to thrive and prosper in exile under pagan kings, one must be faithful to God and be faithful in prayerful dependence on God. We are aliens and strangers in this foreign land as we await the coming of a better city yet to come.

Hebrews 13:14 For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

Implications and application.

First, I have quipped before that you can live a perfect life, always saying and doing the right thing, and still get crucified. Daniel is one of the very few saints in the Bible about whom nothing negative is said.

Christians who live God-fearing, holy lives should expect persecution, even when they are innocent and have done nothing wrong. Holy living is considered a threat to those living in sin.

II Timothy 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Christians should also expect times of official persecution, ordained by human governments and the laws of the land, laws designed to oppose and oppress.

May we have the courage and grace of Daniel and his friends to respond as they did.

Second, Daniel is written to assure Christians that when they suffer for righteousness sake, God will deliver and God will bring His enemies to justice and judgment.

II Timothy 4:16-18 At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! 17 But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So ***I was rescued from the lion's mouth.*** 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Third, God is not committed to keeping us out of lion's dens. He is committed to taking us right into the lion's den to show us who the lion's master is. He leads us into storms to show He is master of the wind and the waves.

God is not committed to our comfort and ease, to making our lives smooth. He never guarantees that. He is committed to sanctifying us and purifying us and training us and teaching us and showing us His power and wisdom and glory.

He sanctifies us in and through the trials and tribulations.

I Peter 1:6-7 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than

gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

But what about those whom God doesn't deliver from the lion's den? What about the countless thousands of martyrs all over the world through all the ages?

What about those burned at the stake or shot and killed or beheaded in recent years? Where they less faithful or less important? Some God delivers from death, others through death. When God doesn't save us from trials, He saves us through trials. Like the three friends in the furnace.

It only depends on what serves God's purposes. Some people die a martyr's death and glorify God in it and accomplish good by it. I think of Jim Elliot and his four missionary companions killed in Ecuador.

Finally, The Law of God is like the law of the Medes and Persians. It is unchangeable and irreversible. It is the perfect standard of holiness. As sinners we all violate the perfect law and are guilty and under the sentence of death.

We as sinners are trapped with no way out of the law. It is as binding as the law of the Medes and the Persians.

Unlike Darius, God's love was able to find a way to deliver us from the law. Jesus took our place and died in our place, He died to sin and death. So now all those who are in Christ are set free from the condemnation of the law of sin and death.

Once condemned by God's law we are now set free from it.

Daniel 6 is not just a foreshadowing of the resurrection, it is also a foreshadowing of the great Day of Judgment. On that day all who are faithful, who trust in Jesus, will be declared innocent, and no harm will come to them. Those who have Christ as their mediator and advocate before the judge will be declared not guilty.

Our salvation rests not on our ability to "Dare to be a Daniel" but on Christ perfect obedience and perfect sacrifice and perfect righteousness. Our peace and rest and hope in this lion's den of a world, rests solely in Christ.

Prayer:

Holy Father, thank you for the faithfulness of your servant Daniel and for your faithfulness to him. Thank you for your deliverance of him and us from the bondage of sin and the grasp of the evil one. Grant to us the same integrity and courage and fearlessness of Daniel in the trials of this life. Be glorified in us and your church, now and always. Amen.