

“Courage Is a Habit” // Daniel 6 // *Shining in Babylon* #6

(DANIEL BUMPER)

If you have your Bible, and I hope you do, turn to Daniel 6. Today we’re going to look at one of the top 3 most famous stories in the Bible--the story of Daniel and the Lions’ Den. But, get this: in the 20 years I’ve been your pastor here at The Summit Church, I have never ONCE preached on this passage. Not even once! I couldn’t believe it. I think it just felt too familiar. Well, today I’m going to fix that. And maybe because I’m headed to the SBC which feels like the Lion’s Den. I don’t know.

This story is the last of the fast-paced, Daniel-doing-battle-in-Babylon narratives in the book of Daniel (actually, there’s one more in chapter 9), but most of the rest of the book is prophecy. Daniel 6 is the last chapter written in Aramaic--remember I told you week 1 that the first chapter of Daniel and last chapters are written in Hebrew, the language of Israel, but the middle chapters are written in Aramaic, the language of Babylon, because they take place in Babylon and are written so that Babylonians can read them also. Well, this is the last story in Aramaic, the last account of Daniel and his 3 friends shining in Babylon. TBH, I’m a little sad. I’ve really enjoyed studying this out.

We’re going to use this story to talk about developing the habit of courage. Courage, I want to show you, is not conjured up in a moment; courage is developed through a lifetime of small, consistent decisions. Courage is a pattern you program into your heart.

You know how when you type something into Google, and it “auto-completes” for you? (That drives me nuts, btw: Just because I searched that one time for the current net worth of Zach from Saved by the Bell doesn’t mean I’m searching for that every time I type in the word “current.” Leave me alone.) But Google knows that we follow patterns, and so it auto-fills our search bar according to how we’ve trained it.

The same thing is true with how you respond to adversity. Your heart autofills your response based on the patterns you’ve established.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle (who lived not long after Daniel) said, **‘Excellence is not an act, it’s a habit.’** I would say the same thing is true about courage: **‘Courage is not an act, it’s a habit.’** It’s developed over years and years and years of repeated patterns.¹

¹ The auto-completes analogy and Aristotle quote are adapted from Steven Furtick’s sermon on Daniel 6.

Works consulted:

“Faith in the One True God Endures Through All Adversity,” Daniel Simmons

“Constant Courage, Unchangeable Situations, and an Unchanging God,” Steven Furtick

“The Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the Lion’s Den,” Mark Driscoll

“In the Lions’ Den,” Beth Moore

Preaching Christ from Daniel, “Daniel in the Lions’ Den,” Sidney Griedanus

“Daniel in the Lions’ Den,” John MacArthur

Daniel 6, let me remind you of the context: Babylon has been overthrown by the Medes and the Persians; Nebuchadnezzar and all the royal family have all been killed and King Darius of the Medes now sits on the throne.

Daniel is now well over 80, still living in captivity in Babylon. We don't know what has happened to his friends, S, M and A--presumably by this point they've already died. The new King, Darius, in order to try to bring some continuity and stability to his government, has kept on his court a lot of Nebuchadnezzar's wise men, including Daniel.

6:3 Daniel distinguished himself... because he had an extraordinary spirit, so the king planned to set him over the whole realm.

One thing that is consistent about Daniel is that no matter where he is--no matter what circumstance he is in, or how he got there, or how unfair his situation--Daniel stays **positive, upbeat even**; believing that even in this God has a plan. And that creates new opportunities wherever he goes. It's like we say, "Attitude determines altitude." At multiple points in his life, when everybody else would have said, "Your life is over," Daniel said, "I bet God still has something for me yet."

And could I just point out that Daniel is **more than 80** at this point? So let me just say it: **Old people can still do awesome things**². BTW, Daniel is not the only old guy in history to do awesome thing:

- At 83, **William Gladstone** became Prime Minister of Great Britain for the fourth time.
- At 85, **John Wesley**, they say, still preached with almost undiminished eloquence, up to 2–3 times a day.³
- At 89, **Michelangelo** painted his "Last Judgment" — now one of the most famous paintings in the world.
- At age 90, **Thomas Edison** was still filing for new inventions at the Patent Office. **George Bernard Shaw** was still writing plays that would become classics.
- **Harland Sanders** was 65 when he opened Kentucky Fried Chicken, after getting fired from about a dozen of his previous jobs.
- **Winston Churchill won his first election at age 62**. He'd lost *every single election* up to that point. Literally His career didn't *REALLY* begin until he was 62. He was 71 when he led England into WW2.

So, for all you "seasoned" people out there, don't let them tell you that you're done. God may have something for you yet.

4 The administrators and satraps, therefore, kept trying to find a charge against Daniel regarding the kingdom. But they could find no charge or corruption, for he was trustworthy, and no negligence or corruption was found in him. (We see it every couple of years around election season. The commercials start multiplying: "So-and-so is a liar; 32 years ago he said this at a party; he voted with big nursery to take candy from babies." And they always seem to find something. But here these guys search and search and can't find anything--and this after 6 decades of public service on Daniel's part! That's pretty remarkable. The point is that Daniel has been utterly trustworthy in all that he did.)

² Adapted from John MacArthur's "Daniel in the Lions' Den" sermon.

³ Closing out a career in which he traveled more than a quarter million miles on horseback, preaching more than 40,000 sermons.

5 Then these men said, “We will never find any charge against this Daniel unless we find something against him concerning the law of his God.” 6 So (they) went together to the king and said to him, “May King Darius live forever. 7 All the administrators of the kingdom—the prefects, satraps, advisers, and governors—have agreed that the king should establish an ordinance that, for thirty days, anyone who petitions any god or man except you, the king, will be thrown into the lions’ den. (The weak spot that they’ve found—and I’ve got to hand it to them—it’s pretty ingenious, is built around Daniel’s faith and the King’s ego. Basically, they are like, “Oh King, your subjects need to learn that they can depend on you for EVERYTHING, so let’s make a rule that for 30 days people can only bring their needs to you--we’re not banning prayer for all time, just for 30 days--so that in those 30 days they can learn you’ll always supply everything they need. In 30 days they’ll see how amazing and all-sufficient you are.”)

8 Therefore, Your Majesty, establish the edict and sign the document so that, as a law of the Medes and Persians, it is irrevocable and cannot be changed.” The Medes and the Persians had this custom that once a law was passed, it couldn’t be changed. The purpose, historians say, was to keep kings from passing arbitrary laws all willy-nilly just because they were in a bad mood: they get beat at pickleball by a left-handed guy so they outlaw left-handedness. The next day the King is irritated with one of his wives so he passes a law that no women can argue with men. In the ancient world kings would do this, and the law would last only a couple of days until the King calmed down. So the Medes and Persians instituted this custom to try and keep the king from doing that. Plus, not allowing a law to be changed helped reinforce the idea that the King was divine, because changing a law implied that he had made a mistake. So, the law was passed.

Daniel’s response? 10 When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went into his house. He opened his upstairs window toward Jerusalem, and three times a day he got down on his knees, prayed, and gave thanks to his God, *just as he had done before.*

There it is: the habit. Daniel has prayed 3 times daily now for 70 years. He’d done it in Daniel 1 when they tried to force him to eat forbidden foods. He’d done it in chapter 2 when the king threatened to kill all the wise men because no one could interpret his dream. His friends had done it in Daniel 3 when Nebuchadnezzar tried to force them to bow down to his golden image. Whenever Daniel had been in trouble, whenever Daniel felt threatened he’d turned to God in prayer. So this response was as natural to him as breathing.

So here’s my question. **What’s your instinct when trouble comes?** When you’ve been hurt in your marriage; when your spouse is not treating you fairly and it’s just not getting any better.

What’s your instinct when you feel threatened?

- When you feel like you are being pressured at your job to do the wrong thing; or you’re being treated unfairly by your boss or colleagues;
- Or when you’re being pressured to toe the party line even though it goes against your conscience;
- or maybe when a friend or a boyfriend or girlfriend is pressuring you to do the wrong thing. You’re being pressured to conform.

I’d say our responses usually fit into 1 of 4 categories.

1. **Panic:** You get scared and you cave. *“Look, there’s no way out; the pressure is too strong. All my friends are doing it; I’ll be an outcast if I don’t. Everybody in my business does it; I’ll never survive if I don’t. There’s this law of the Medes and Persians and it can’t be changed and the king and all the important people are behind it. I don’t really have a choice here if I want to survive.”* I love this verse, *“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to man. But God, who is faithful, will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to bear it.”* (1 Cor 10:13). IOW, God always provides a way of escape; he will always supply you with the strength and wisdom and ability to do the right thing. You never need to panic; you’re never trapped in a situation with only bad options.⁴
2. A **second common response** to this kind of pressure is **Pride:** And this one is tricky because it can look, on the outside, like bold faith, because you say *“I will not yield to you. I can overcome this.”* The DIFFERENCE between this response and faith is that when you peel back the layers of this response, what you find is not a humble dependence on God but a heart of self-sufficiency. This is more of a “I’m better than you” attitude, a “you can’t beat me” attitude than a “I’m going to do what God wants and trust him with the results” one. BTW, the sign that you are operating in pride is “prayerlessness.” **Prayerlessness is the indicator light on the dashboard of the Christian life that warns you that pride has set it.** (You know how on your car dashboard you’ve got a little indicator light that tells you that your engine is too hot? Let’s get to know one another a bit: *How many of you fill up your gas once it hits half empty? How many wait until the little countdown says “one mile left?” And then your prayer life really takes off, doesn’t it? You’ve never prayed so desperately and fervently as you do when trying to get to the gas station with one mile until empty.* OK, how about indicator lights...How many of you, the second the light comes on, take your car to the shop? How many of you treat that light more like a suggestion? You’re like, “I’m gonna wait and see if it just works itself out.” **What are you laughing at, Veronica?** But probably that’s burned you at some point, hasn’t it? Those little indicator lights alert you to problems going on deep in your engine that you can’t see. **Prayerlessness is the indicator light that your heart is running proud.** Many people think that prayerlessness is the result of a lack of self-discipline--they don’t pray enough for the same reason they don’t work out enough or eat enough alfalfa sprouts or get up early enough--a lack of self-discipline. But prayerlessness is ultimately rooted in pride; you don’t pray consistently because you are convinced that if you reach down deep enough, and try hard enough, you’ll find the resources to overcome! But at some point, listen, that’s going to fail you. At the end of Daniel 4, King Nebuchadnezzar said, **“All those who walk in pride God is able to humble.”** God is going to put you into a situation where you can’t overcome. **Some of you are there now, aren’t you?** *You come in here overwhelmed by the challenges of parenting. Utterly defeated by your marriage. Financially underwater. Crushed by a relationship that you just can’t make work. An issue has come up in your health or the health of a loved one that has you scared to death.* At the end of Daniel 4, after God had humbled him, King Nebuchadnezzar said, **“All those who walk in pride God is able to humble.”** That is true for professing Christians, too. For you that know God, his agenda--dare I say his primary agenda--in your life is to humble you out of the pride of self-sufficiency. If that’s you, my word to you today: Turn away from pride and turn toward God.

⁴ I owe pieces of this insight on panic to Beth Moore’s teaching on this passage

3. *Panic, Pride*, third response: **Preemptive strike**. This is the *Quid Pro Quo* Bryan talked about last week. *Something for something; tit for tat*. I'll protect myself by fighting. "You hurt me? I'll hurt you back. You play dirty, I'll play dirtier." When Daniel found out about this law, he could have tried to engineer some political trick back at them. *Quid Pro Quo* is how most of us try to survive. We live in peace with others through 'mutually assured destruction' with them--some of you are are this way in your marriage: *The way I'll keep you from hurting me is by making it clear that if you do, I'll hurt you back. Worse. Then you'll learn. You'll think twice about messing with me.*
4. *Panic, Pride, Preemptive strike*. Then there is Daniel's response. **Prayer**: Let me lay this at God's feet. Daniel is like, "Ultimately these are his problems, because I don't belong to me anymore, I belong to him, which means these problems don't belong to me, either, they belong to him. All I'm responsible for is what he tells me to do." **Friend, this is such an incredible way to live**. It's so peaceful, because you let Jesus shoulder the weight of your problems. Jesus described the Christian life as easy--not because it is all sunshine and giggles and roses, but because Jesus says we are "yoked up" with Jesus: **"Come unto me, (he says) all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.... and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."** (Matt 11:28-30). **A yoke (PIC), you see, typically had places for two oxen**—and they pulled the load together. So, if one ox was stronger, the other got the benefit of his strength. Imagine you were strapped into this yoke to pull a tractor trailer, but strapped in next to you was the world's strongest man. John Muller (Pastor John's like 6'5" and looks like a character from a French romance novel--am I right?). Or Peter Park at the DDC (Peter's not that big but he does CrossFit every day). (I would say Ricky from the NDC because he's ripped up top but you've seen those crazy little chicken legs of his.) But, say you're strapped in with one of those guys who is a lot stronger than you. The load might not seem that heavy to you, because the stronger guy is pulling so much of the weight. It might even seem to you like you are just out taking a walk. **So it is with Jesus**. When I trust in him, he shoulders the weight of my marriage problems. And my work problems. And my parenting problems. And my personal struggles. In each of these things, he carries the weight; I'm responsible only to do what he directs me to do. People ask how I've shouldered the weight of the SBC these last 3 years--easy, I haven't shouldered it. He has. I've just done what he tells me to do. *What a friend we have in Jesus, oh what needless pain we bear; all because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer. "Cast your burdens upon the Lord," Peter says, and he will sustain you." Trust in the Lord with all your heart*, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he'll make your paths straight.

Panic, pride, preemptive strike, or prayer. What's your default? You have one. What *autofills in the search bar* of your heart when hard times come? When you type in **"P.."** what fills in the rest? When you feel threatened? Panicky?

Daniel chose prayer, because he trusted in God, and that evening he prayed as peacefully as he had every other one.

Friend, I can tell you from experience that there's a peacefulness in that prayer closet you won't find anywhere else--not in yoga, or meditation; not in nature, not in a drink after work, not in the company of good

friends. *Sweet hour of prayer, Sweet hour of prayer, That calls me from a world of care, And bids me at my Father's throne, Make all my wants and wishes known, In seasons of distress and grief, My soul has often found relief, And oft escaped the tempter's snare, By Thy return, sweet hour of prayer*

So Daniel prays, and of course, the other wise men see this. They run to the king, scarcely able to contain their excitement: vs. 12, "You know, King, we hate, I mean, just hate, to tell you this, but after you signed this irrevocable edict we all saw Daniel praying. We all just happened to be on the balcony right across from his house all looking through our binoculars at the same time as his regularly scheduled prayer time, and we all saw him. (PAUSE.) And sadly, King, you know the law of the Medes and Persians can't be changed, so, we've prepared the lions. Right this way, sir."

Darius, of course, sees through their ruse immediately, and he's pretty upset by it, because he liked Daniel so much, but he's also bound by this ridiculous custom, so he feels like he has no choice but to throw Daniel in the lion's den: 16 So the king gave the order.

BTW, I know, a lot of y'all think I hate on cats too much. But can we take a moment just reflect that a pagan King--who could have concocted any kind of torture--decided that THE most cruel and unusual punishment he could think of was trapping you in a cage with cats? Friend, the Scriptures speak for themselves. And ALL God's people said / some of God's people...

The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you continually serve (underline continually), rescue you!" 17 A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den. The king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing in regard to Daniel could be changed. 18 Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting. No diversions were brought to him (he turned off his Netflix and put away his Xbox), and he could not sleep.

19 At the first light of dawn the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. 20 When he reached the den, he cried out in anguish to Daniel: "Daniel, servant of the living God... has your God, whom you continually (see the repetition of that word in this story?--he's done it his whole life) serve, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

21 Then Daniel spoke with the king: "May the king live forever. 22 My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths; and they haven't harmed me, for I was found innocent before him."

Daniel's down there peacefully taking a cat nap with all those lions like he's snuggled up in a cadre of kittens. **You know, it strikes me when I read this story that literally everyone else in this story** was up the whole night except Daniel. The jealous wise men were up all night partying; the king was up all night worrying; Daniel's friends were up all night praying; the angel was up all night protecting; Daniel was the only one who got a good night's sleep! LOOK AT TRANSCRIPT: When the King orders the stone rolled away from the den the next day, there's Daniel, snuggled up peacefully with a book, reading between the lions.

23 The king was overjoyed and gave orders to take Daniel out of the den. When Daniel was brought up from the den, he was found to be unharmed, *because he trusted in his God*. (Hey--why does the text say God saved Daniel like this? Was it because Daniel was special, or because God knew he was writing a Bible story, or because he was elected or foreordained or predestined? The text says it happened for ONE reason: because Daniel *trusted in his God*. That means you can look for this same kind of providential protection in your life if you pray like Daniel did. That doesn't mean that bad things will never happen to you, just that God will ultimately deliver you through them all, just like he did Daniel.)

24 The king then gave the command, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and thrown into the lions' den—they, their children, and their wives. They had not reached the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. **Why does the text mention that the lions ate them before their bodies even reached the bottom?** Just in case you thought that maybe the lions hadn't eaten Daniel because they were full. Clearly, they were starving.

And let's acknowledge--that last part, especially with the wives and children being included in this punishment--is really hard to read. It feels unfair and cruel, and it was. The Bible is certainly not condoning this. In fact, in the book of Ezekiel, God explicitly condemns this kind of cruelty, where the children are punished for the sins of their parents, but this was common in ancient times. Kings would kill not just their enemies but everyone in their enemy's family lest the kids grow up to try to avenge their parents. These were vicious times, and women and children were often the victims of this viciousness. But the Bible is certainly not condoning it. Read this as *descriptive*; not *prescriptive*.

25 Then King Darius wrote to those of every people, nation, and language who live on the whole earth: "May your prosperity abound. 26 I issue a decree that in all my royal dominion, people must tremble in fear before the God of Daniel: *For he is the living God, and he endures forever; his kingdom will never be destroyed, and his dominion has no end. 27 He rescues and delivers; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth, for he has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.*"

This chapter started with a prohibition on prayer but ends with a pagan King preaching a sermon about God's providential protection. And it's actually a pretty good little mini-sermon. Darius declares that God is:

- **Global** – He's the God of "*all the peoples, nations, and languages*" in all the earth." Contrary to what Babylonians believe, and 21st century Americans believe, he's not a tribal deity, where you have your God and I have mine." This is not a God about whom you can say, "Well, I've got my God and you've got yours. You can have your truth and I'll have mine." This is one God and one truth for all peoples in all times and at all places. BTW, one of the dumbest phrases in our culture is, "This is my truth." There's no such thing. Truth is not private. There's *the* truth, and we conform our lives to it, not try to conform it to us.
- Secondly, Darius says, God is **Personal** – he's "*the living God*" (not like those Babylonian gods that neither speak nor relate to humans; gods that you have to carry around from place to place and leave food in front of. The true God is a living, active, speaking God.)
- Vs. 26, He's **Eternal** – "*enduring forever*." It's God, not the King, who lives forever.
- He's **Sovereign**: "*his kingdom shall never be destroyed*"
- He's **Faithful** – "*he delivers and rescues*" his people.
- **He's Immanent** – King Darius says, "*he works signs and wonders in heaven and earth.*" Immanent is a word that means that he is close by and engaged, not far away. This is not a God sitting above heaven,

uninvolved. This is a God actively at work in the world today, actively pursuing you, actively working in your life if you know how to look for it.

- Finally, Darius says, he's the **Savior** – he “*rescued Daniel.*” This is a God who didn't leave his people to perish in a dark pit, but came to them and entered it with them and is ready to help all those who call on him.⁵

That's a pretty good little sermon. Daniel is the book in the Bible where we see amazing sermons preached by formerly pagan Kings. And how do they learn these things? They learn them as Daniel and his friends live with consistency and courage in front of them. And that's the whole point of Daniel: this is what God promises will happen around us if we live like they did, if we shine in Raleigh-Durham like they shone in Babylon. **Listen: Babylon is not a place for spiritual weaklings:** it will chew you up and spit you out. In Daniel's case, literally! But for those who live with wisdom, who live with consistency and courage, they will “*...shine like the brightness of the heavens above... like the stars forever and ever.*” (Dan 12:3)

28 So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian. (who reigned after him).

Two things from this story I want to leave you with:

First, Courage in the lions' den comes from consistency in the prayer closet. Like I said, Daniel didn't summon up courage the moment he was thrown in the lion's den. His courage was the result of years and years of small, faithful acts of obedience. Patterns he had laid down.

I'm not a prophet, but let me make a prophecy I think you can take the bank: If you wait until the hour of trial to decide what you'll do, you will fail.

- Do you want to know that you'll have the courage to stand when everybody around you is doing the wrong thing?
- Or that you'll have the courage to maintain your integrity when the temptation to cheat is overwhelming?
- Or the courage to live out your convictions when everybody around you tells you that you're crazy?
- Do you want to know if you'll maintain your confession of faith in a hostile environment?
- I can predict all that. I can predict it based on what you're doing NOW. What you'll do *then* is determined by what you're doing now. Courage isn't conjured up in the heat of the moment; courage comes from consistently in the prayer closet.

High school and college students, let me talk specifically to you for a moment: Do you want to know that you'll have the ability to maintain your confession of faith when everybody else in your class and your professor mocks you? Or that you'll have the courage to remain sexually pure? **That will be determined not by what you think you'll decide in the moment, but by the first thing you choose to do when you get out of bed tomorrow morning.** Your courage in those moments is determined by whether you are NOW developing small, consistent habits of obedience--like a daily time of prayer.

⁵ I adapted this list from Mark Driscoll message on Daniel 6.

Daniel had pre-decided to follow Jesus, and that was demonstrated by regularly meeting with God to pour out his problems to him.

- **My dad used to say**, “Son, if you wait until the moment of temptation to decide if you’ll remain sexually pure, you’ll always make the wrong decision. Decide now, and begin to walk with God, and when the hour of temptation comes, God will give you the resources to overcome.”

That blank in the google search of your heart will not auto-fill with courage unless you have trained it through small, consistent acts of obedience. Courage is not conjured up in the heat of the moment; **courage comes from consistency in the prayer closet.**

Second, Seeing Jesus as the Greater Daniel Is the Strength of Courage

One of the mistakes people make with this story is they turn it into a hero tale, where we leave aspiring to be Daniel: “Dare to be a Daniel!” was how I often heard it preached. And, as I’ve shown you, there is certainly much about Daniel’s life to emulate.

But that’s not the main point of this story, or any Old Testament story, for that matter. As I’ve told you, **the OT was not primarily written to give us heroes to emulate, but a Savior to adore.** If you try to copy the example of a Daniel, or a David or an Abraham or Esther or Ruth, you’ll likely end up discouraged by your failure. That’s how it is for me, at least. No matter how much I coach myself or how many pep-talks I give to myself in the mirror, I can’t sustain lasting courage. I may succeed for a moment, but it’s usually only to fall back on my face again, more discouraged and hopeless-feeling than ever.

But when you see that Daniel’s story, like all stories in the OT, is there to point you to Jesus, this story takes on a new meaning. You see, there’s a lot of parallels between what Daniel went through and what Jesus went through. Consider:

- Both Daniel and Jesus are pictures of innocence. Daniel is one of 3 men in the Old Testament about whom there is no mention of a single flaw.⁶ The prophet Ezekiel says he is one of the 3 most righteous people ever to live. Jesus, of course, lived totally without sin. No impure thought or motive ever entered his head.
- Both Daniel and Jesus had jealous political leaders drum up false charges against them to get them killed.
- Both Daniel and Jesus had the primary judge in charge (for Daniel, that would have been Darius; and for Jesus, it would have been Pilate) declare them innocent and try to spare them
- Both Daniel and Jesus were thrown into a pit whose entrance was covered by a large stone and sealed with a government seal, left for dead
- Both Daniel and Jesus had loving friends run to their tomb early in the morning
- Both Daniel and Jesus walked out of the tomb alive the next morning
- Both Daniel and Jesus, after their ordeal, were raised up as 2nd in command over the kingdom (Daniel under Darius; Jesus under God the Father in Heaven)⁷

⁶ The other 2 are Joseph and Jonathan. Ezek 14:14 also says, “Even if these three men--Noah, Daniel and Job--were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

⁷ Inspired and adapted from Mark Driscoll’s message

There is one big difference between Daniel and Jesus, however: Daniel eventually died, but Jesus defeated death.

We do a disservice to this story when we reduce it to just a little kids' story about being brave. We have this fun little image of Daniel down there with all the big kittens. But make no mistake: this is no **kids' adventure tale.** **The only reason we think that is we live in a place where** we are not terrified of lions.

Lions are vicious creatures: those who live in their proximity know that you can't take them for granted for even a single second. I was reading the account of a **park ranger in the Kruger National Park** in South Africa who is one of the few people in the world to have been attacked by a lion and survived.

He didn't know it, but one afternoon as he was riding his horse through the park he was being stalked by a pair of lions. Suddenly, he said, one lion lunged at him from the tall grass, barely missing him and knocking the horse out from underneath him. That first lion went to work on his horse, when he heard a deafening, horrifying roar from right behind him as a second lion pounced on him. He remembered some of his training and went totally limp, trying to make the lion think he was dead, to try and buy him some time. Luckily, he said, the lion didn't grab him by the neck, which would have killed him instantly, but his shoulder, which the lion crushed between his jaws, causing the most excruciating pain, which he said, "made this whole 'go limp and play dead' strategy really difficult." The lion dragged him 60 yards toward his lair.

He said "My face was shoved into his mane, the smell was awful, and the lion purred the whole way there." He assumed that was in pleasant anticipation of his meal. Cats are evil, I'm telling you. The man said the whole time he was trying to figure out what to do next when he remembered he had strapped his hunting knife onto his right hip that morning. But he was just sure it had been knocked off when he had knocked off his horse: Let me just read you his words:

"It took me some time to work my left hand around my back as the lion dragged me over the ground, but eventually, I reached the sheath and to my indescribable joy the knife was still there! I secured it, wondering where best to stab the lion. I remembered hearing many years before that **if you hit a cat on the nose, he will sneeze.** This particular **theory is of course incorrect.** but at the time I thought it might be true, though I dismissed the notion, deciding that even if it worked the lion would **just sneeze and pick me up again. So, I decided to aim my knife for his heart.** (I moved smoothly and silently as a serpent, because) any fumbling in this maneuver would arouse the lion with **instantly fatal results to myself.** Knowing where his heart was located, I **struck him twice in quick succession.** The lion instantly dropped me and let out a **furious roar and I struck him again, this time upwards into his throat, which severed his jugular and killed him.**"⁸

MUSIC

⁸ Quote is edited for clarity, flow. Heard it first shared in Beth Moore's teaching on this passage

Now, why do I share all this disturbing detail? I'm wanting you to feel just a smidgeon of the horror of a lion attack. Daniel in the Lion's Den is no gentle kids' story. It's a horror story. And I want you to feel that horror because this whole story is a picture of the cross.

You see, Psalm 22 says that on the cross, Jesus was thrown to the lions of judgment, which circled him, taunted him, and then tore him apart. Jesus was far more innocent even than Daniel ever was--yet before Jesus' body reached the bottom of the pit--he only made it 6 hours on the cross!--the lions had torn him to pieces. Unlike with Daniel, **no angel came to stand by him and shut the lion's mouths.**

To quote Sally Lloyd-Jones, "Jesus was left in the blackness utterly alone and abandoned by God, suffering the fate that we, the guilty ones, deserved. God did not shut the mouths of Jesus' lions like he did Daniel's; he let them tear him apart. His body was left entombed in the icy grip of death for three days before the angel finally came to roll away his stone..."

But he was bearing our sin. He went into that pit for me. And, that's where Jesus and Daniel are different. You see, "When Daniel came forth from the lion's den, he came out alone, and no one else was saved by God's deliverance of him. But when Jesus came forth from the tomb, he came out as the head of a mighty company of people who have been redeemed from the pit through his death... Because of the work of Christ on behalf of his people, the divine judge says: 'Not guilty! You may go free!'"⁹

And see, here's the thing: If I know that, and I know he has taken into himself all judgment for my sin, that there is no condemnation any more for those who are in Christ Jesus, that means that in whatever I am going through now, I can know God is with me, standing beside me, because anything that would have turned God against me, Jesus has removed at the cross. And see, then, ***If God is for me, who can be against me? If the Lord is my strength and my shield, my light and my salvation, of whom should I be afraid?*** I don't have to be afraid of those who kill the body, because I have a God who can preserve the soul. That God is with me in cancer; he's with me when death takes a family member; he's with me in the pain of betrayal and the sting of injustice; he's with me in every struggle, frustration and failure that I go through, promising never to leave or forsake me, promising to overcome through me, constantly whispering "Greater is he that is in you than anything or anyone in the world." So *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear for thou art with me! Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me!"*

Knowing that the Jesus to whom Daniel's life points is with me gives me the courage to face danger like Daniel, and to be consistent like Daniel--AND the ability to get up and keep going when I haven't been consistent. **So thank God for examples like Daniel, but worship Jesus, who took your punishment in the Lion's Den and now promises to preserve you in the den of any lions you face today.** With him, you can have the courage to face anything.

⁹ Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible*.

PRAYER

- What's your instinct? Where do you need to run to him and leave it in prayer?
- Challenge: Decide to start a daily prayer time? 5 mins a day for 21 days, then it will be harder to stop than it was to start.

