

Daniel in the Lions' Den
Daniel 6

Friends, of all the stories in the book of Daniel, the story of Daniel in the Lions' Den is probably the most famous and recognizable of them all.

And... at first glance... this story appears to encourage people to persist in their religious practices – like prayer, even when there is a law in place which forbids it.

In the story we see the King being persuaded to make it illegal to pray to anyone but himself for thirty days and anyone who does not comply will be thrown into a den of lions. But in spite of the law Daniel doesn't stop praying to Yahweh even though it will cost him his life.

And we respect Daniel's courage to stand up for what he believes in; we admire his resolve to practice his faith, we are impressed that he is not intimidated by a piece of legislation which discriminates against him – because friends... our Canadian culture eats this sort of stuff up!

We certainly have our concerns about Islamist extremism... but Quebec's Bill 22 which restricts gov't employees from wearing religious symbols at work – and seems to be aimed mostly at Muslims, well that's enough to put the rest of the country in an uproar about religious rights and freedoms.

And we applaud those who would stand up and quit their jobs or leave the province before they would take off their religious symbols at work.

And who can forget Malala Yousafzai – that young Pakistani girl who survived an assassination attempt by the Taliban.

The west has responded to her bravery and courage to stand up for educating girls with such overwhelming support that people in her home country wondered if she was a puppet for the West and if the whole thing was staged – that's how popular she is with us.

And even someone as controversial as Lady Gaga can get respect and credibility as an artist because whether or not we

appreciate her bizarre and shocking presentation of her music most people will say *“at least she is taking a stand for what she believes in and she’s being true to who she is...”*

We love this sort of stuff – even if we disagree with how it’s expressed.

Because as post-modern westerners we recoil against the thought of a government forcing people to do things that go against their conscience or deny individual expression.

And so there are parts of the story of Daniel in the Lions’ Den that resonate with our cultural values of standing up for what you believe in, and being true to who you are.

But as we discovered last week, we need to watch out for these simplistic understandings or surface readings of these stories in Daniel.

Because we will miss the deeper truths and complexities which these stories are using to try to communicate with us

and most of all - we’ll miss how it points us – as all scripture does - to put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

So you see friends - as wonderful as it is to stand up for what you believe in, and as noble and authentic as it is to be true to yourself – these are cultural values at best – not biblical ones and at the end of our lives when we stand before God to give an account of what we’ve done, the only hope we have of surviving that judgment is if we have grabbed on to Jesus Christ as our substitute and put our faith and trust in Him!

Because the problem in this world, the ultimate problem with human beings - is not that we don’t stand up for our beliefs or that we are not authentically expressing ourselves – the problem is Sin... and standing up for our beliefs or expressing ourselves does not overcome it.

Only the incarnation, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ overcomes sin. So, if you happened to notice some parallels between this story and the Easter story – then you

are getting closer to understanding the deeper meaning this story communicates that is pointing us to Jesus Christ.

You may have noticed how in both stories a stone rolled in front of lions' den and the tomb and it is sealed, and in the end both Daniel and Jesus come out alive.

We can also compare how both Daniel and Jesus are arrested on trumped up charges by jealous colleagues, and how King Darius attempts to have Daniel freed and how Pontius Pilate attempts to set Jesus free.

So, there are similarities between the Easter story and Daniel's story which foreshadow the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and comparing them is an easy way to move to a deeper understanding of this story.

But I think we can go even deeper than this, friends.

As much as it might look like it - this is not a story about standing up for your rights in the face of gov't persecution –

because if you noticed – King Darius had no problem with Daniel or his religious practices whatsoever.

In fact Daniel was a favorite of King Darius' and he was about to be appointed as ruler over all the Satraps in the Kingdom to make sure they were not cheating the King.

Nobody has a problem with Daniel's religion - the problems start when the corrupt Satraps realize that if Daniel becomes their overseer – their days of filing false expense claims and getting away with owning primary residences outside of their constituencies are over...

Unless of course Daniel could be persuaded to let things slide.

Perhaps they could find some skeletons in Daniel's closet – like a video of Daniel smoking crack - and they could use it to blackmail him, or maybe Daniel could be bribed?

But Daniel was squeaky clean - as the text says *“They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.”* (vs. 4)

So they realize they are going to have to manipulate the circumstances and find some way to turn the King against Daniel to prevent him from being put in charge.

So, they come up with the plan to make it illegal to pray to anyone but the King for a month because they know Daniel will not comply with this.

Of course when they go to the King with their scheme pretending they have his best interests in mind.

They present it as a great way to promote unity among the rulers in his Kingdom – that’s why we get this long list of who has suggested the King do this.

“the royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed”(vs. 7)

Because Darius had just decentralized his administration by creating 120 districts – “satrapies” across his Kingdom each with its own Satrap to rule it...

So the idea of having all his subjects and rulers “pray” to him over the next month – as opposed to their local gods - would be a great way to ensure and test their loyalty to the Crown.

So King Darius agrees to puts the legislation into effect and he issues the decree.

Ironically Darius has just issues a law which will trap and condemn his one loyal administrator and will enable these corrupts Satraps to continue to be disloyal and cheat the King.

So now the stage has been set for the confrontation of loyalties. However this confrontation of loyalties only takes place because this decree, issued according to the Laws of the Medes and Persians, is irrevocable.

If the Laws of the Medes and the Persians could be changed, then once the King discovered that the Satraps had tricked him into indicting Daniel – the King could have simply revoked his previous ruling – and end of story... The King didn't want to have a show down with Daniel.

But the King can't repeal his law – he's stuck, trapped by his own ruling, he can't find a way out of it, so the Satraps get their way and Daniel is thrown to the Lions.

Now you might be thinking – that's dumb! What's the point of being King if you can't change your own rules?

Well, the purpose of the legal tradition of the Medes and the Persians was to prevent Kings from being capricious and fickle, to hold them to their word - so they would keep their election promises so to speak.

So what we see going on here is that something good – this legal tradition - has been twisted, perverted and warped to bring about something other than what it is actually supposed to.

Now does this remind you of any other situations you might have read about in scripture?

What about when Paul was writing about how sin twisted the Law of Moses so that by the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had made it into a burden of discouragement instead of something that gave life.

He writes in Romans 7:10-11, *"I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death."*

If that's not a good comparison of what the Satraps were attempting to do to Daniel by twisting the Laws of the Medes and the Persians, I don't know what would be!

And so friends, understanding how the Law was being misused and twisted and perverted in this story – helps us to gain a

deeper understanding, and a clearer picture of the nature of Sin.

Sin twists and perverts anything and everything that God intended for our good – grossly or subtly... but either way, it brings spiritual death into our lives and eventually physical death.

And in fact Sin first entered into this world through Satan twisting God's good warning about the boundaries surrounding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God had decreed that eating from this tree would bring death to those He made in His Image – and when Eve and then Adam took the fruit and ate it - God had no choice but to keep his word and enact the consequences for Adam and Eve's rebellion – and the creation was cursed.

And so we read in Gen 3:16 and onwards about pain in childbearing, dysfunction between male and female, thorns

and thistles in the ground, hard work and toil – this will be our life until death returns us to the dust of the earth.

So friends – if we look deep enough we can see that this story teaches us about the nature of sin and why gov't corruption and murderous schemes and politicking exist in the first place.

And you have to pity King Darius who is trapped by his own law – He tries to find some sort of loophole that would allow him to spare Daniel – but he can't, not without undermining his credibility and risking open rebellion from all his Satraps.

So eventually he has to give the order to have Daniel thrown to the lions and all he can do is tell Daniel that he hopes his God can save him!

Now we know how the story ends – God does save Daniel and the corrupt Satraps are fed to the lions instead.

But what do we learn from how this takes place if we push this a little deeper?

Notice friends that God does not step in and prevent Daniel from being arrested; he doesn't provide wisdom to the King to discover a legal loop-hole to repeal the law, in fact there's no indication of any sort that rescue is coming – Daniel is given to the lions and the gate is sealed.

So what we need to see here is that God does not save Daniel **from** the lions' den – He saves Daniel **through** the lions' den!

And friends, that is exactly how God works on a much larger scale with all of creation – He doesn't save this world **from** the curse – He saves it **through** the curse.

This is what Paul is talking about in Romans 8:20

“For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope [not wishing – but a confidence, an expectation] that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.”

He saves it **through** the curse.

Friends if you ever question why the Almighty, the all-powerful Yahweh doesn't just step in to do away with all the death and suffering and sorrow in this world –

it's because He had to curse the world as a consequence of Adam and Eve's rebellion – that's what He decreed would happen if they disobeyed him and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...

It's like parenting – when you tell your kids there will be consequences if they don't obey you, when they break the rules you have to follow through with your word... even if it means your kids have to miss out on something fun that you really want to give them.

So God has to allow sin to twist his good creation and bring death, and suffering and pain - just as King Darius had to arrest Daniel and throw him to the lions – not only because they are bound by their word – but because, unbeknownst to

King Darius, this is the only way to redeem that which has been perverted and twisted by sin.

God redeems the good legal tradition of the Medes and Persians which provides checks and balances to the all-powerful rulers of the Empire by bringing Daniel **through** the consequence of the lions' den – unharmed.

And God redeems all of His good creation that is affected by sin by bringing His word made flesh - Jesus Christ – through the consequence of the curse... the tomb, death – not just unharmed but resurrected to a new spiritual life - that will eventually renew this entire creation!

So God has kept His Word and overcome the consequences of His Word without having broken His Word – and has demonstrated that He will renew all things through His Word - and this is good news for us because it means that we can truly trust the integrity of God's Word.

So friends believe the promise in God's Word which says *“that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”* (Phil 1:6)

God is redeeming us. He is at work in us through the Holy Spirit, remaking us to become like Jesus Christ - undoing all the ways in which sin twists and warps our human nature.

And friends – it's easy to see our own sin nature when we read about Daniel isn't it?

Very few of us could ever be like him. We have too many skeletons in our closet, bad habits, we could be persuaded to look the other way, and if our enemies plot against us – well two can play at that game... forget turning the other cheek!

And the few of us who seem to soar above all this petty stuff – well its so very easy to become proud of that... and look down on those who just can't seem to keep it all together – so self-righteousness and pride gets us every time.

We too were created to be good - but we are affected by sin, twisted and warped and we are broken.

And friends, if there's one thing that we can learn from this story that we need to apply to our own lives it is this – Jesus doesn't save us **from** our brokenness – He saves us **through** our brokenness.

Let's consider what that means for us friends – that Jesus saves us **through** our brokenness...

It means that we need to place a much higher value on honesty and authenticity, and we must not confuse these biblical characteristics with our cultural values of standing up for our beliefs and individual self-expression.

It means that we need to admit how often we think – I'm supposed to be a Christian – I can't let anyone know that I feel like this, that I think like this, that I struggle with this – if they found out, well... they'd throw me to the lions!

It means that following Jesus is not about always doing the right things, saying the right things, or believing the right things and acting like things are so perfect in your life because you are a Christian.

Eventually friends – you'll say “I just can't do it anymore, I can't be the person that I should be – I can't live this Christian life!”

I'm always amazed at how easy it is for sin to twist the good news of Jesus' salvation into a burden, and have us believe that since Jesus died for us we ought to do a better job of being good people.

You see friends – that would be Jesus saving us from our brokenness... but the truth is we are saved through our brokenness... as God draws close to us in Jesus Christ and unravels the twisted mess that is our sinful nature all the way down to the very core of who we are.

And that is a terrifying place to go – as terrifying as any Lions’ den... and it can devour us – it would devour us, were it not for the fact that Jesus is there with us – alongside of us in our brokenness, bringing us through the night towards the dawn of redemption.

And friends – while it may seem like this would cause us to resent Jesus for bringing up the things about ourselves we’d rather forget, being saved through our brokenness will cause us to love the Lord more– because we will come to understand the full scope of how much we have been forgiven.

As Jesus said “he who has been forgiven little loves little – but he who has been forgiven much – loves much” (Luke 7:47)

So ultimately this means that we are enabled to live out of love and gratitude and our religious practices or our spiritual disciplines flow out of this – instead of expressing our individuality we express our love for Christ.

And should we ever encounter a situation where we would face a penalty for expressing our love for our savior Jesus Christ...

We don’t have to take a stand up for what we believe in - we can simply keep on living out of His love, confident and secure that since God saved Daniel through the Lions’ Den, and that Christ saves us through our brokenness...

So, whatever may come the Lord will be there with us in the midst of it and He will bring salvation through it – because He is faithful to His Word – always has been... always will be!

Amen.