

Session 4

September 24, 2023

LIVE COURAGEOUSLY

Daniel 6:6-13, 16-17, 21-23

This chapter tells one of the great stories of the Bible: “Daniel and the Lions’ Den.” While many a sermon has attempted to allegorize the tale, the best approach is the simplest: 1) examine the historical/literal context for when it was written; 2) interpret the text as plainly as possible in light of the context; 3) discern the truth as it applied in the life of Daniel; 4) make similar and appropriate applications of that truth in today’s context. The drama plays out in three scenes.

Deception (vv. 1-9). The backdrop to this story is filled with complex activities and emotions. King Darius was no doubt trying to run a kingdom efficiently, and the appointment of *satraps* (or “governors”) and chief administrators made pretty good sense. He was most likely, thus far, pleased with himself. Daniel was one of the three chief administrators. He obviously took his responsibilities very seriously, because he “distinguished himself” above the others (literally *outshined* the others) with an “excellent spirit.” The other administrators and satraps were jealous of either his special gifts, or his special status, or both. In short, they wanted him gone! That jealousy led to deception. Since they could find no corruption in him (v. 4), they decided to create some! Whereas King Darius was willing to let the administrators run the realm, he was *not* willing to forfeit his own pride. So when the others devised a silly 30-day “you only pray to the king or get eaten by the lions” edict (v. 7), the king was more than happy to sign it. Two hooks were embedded in this bait. First, the satraps insisted the king sign it himself, assuring it was so thoroughly wrapped up in the “law of the Medes and Persians” that it could not be revoked. And second, they knew that Daniel’s religion would snag him, even if the king did not yet realize it. For reflection: *What do you think the author meant when he said Daniel had an “extraordinary” (or “excellent”) spirit? What might that look like in our context?*

Devotion (vv. 10-15). This section reveals just how corrupt the king’s administrators really were—especially when compared to Daniel’s devotion. Daniel did exactly what they knew he would do: he continued his prayers to God (v. 10). Notice the key phrase, “just as he had done before.” With the trap sprung, it was time for them to approach the king. First, they had the king confirm his edict (v. 12). Then, they pointed out Daniel’s rebellion specifically (v. 13); then they rebuked the king for trying to save Daniel from the consequences of the edict he himself had signed (v. 15). For reflection: *How would you explain the king’s conundrum? How did he put himself in the position of sacrificing a friend and trusted administrator? How could that have been avoided?*

Deliverance (vv. 16-24). Now even the King was trapped. As king, he had no choice but to follow through with the consequences of the edict that he had signed. To give special treatment to his favorite administrator would have been political suicide. For this reason, he signed the death warrant for Daniel, did his best to encourage him, put him in the lions’ den, covered the opening with a stone, and sealed it with his official signet. Notice that the other nobles were required to “sign off” on the execution as well (v. 17). This ensured their responsibility for the act was recorded. (This would come in handy later!). We all know how the story ends! Daniel is delivered by God and justified as innocent. The evil satraps (together with their families) were

cast into Daniel's place of judgement and were killed before they hit the bottom of the pit. Notice especially the prominence of Daniel's testimony, mentioned in verses 16, 20, and 23. Daniel's devotion had paid off. For reflection: *Without becoming too allegorical, what foreshadows of Christ's death and resurrection can you see? Why do you think I call this foreshadowing rather than prophecy?*