

## **Bold as Lions | Daniel in the Lion's Den | April 7, 2019 | Matthew McNutt**

[Slide 1, title slide] Daniel in the Lion's Den! Have you heard of it? Dan the man. It's one of the more obscure, lesser known passages in scripture. Wait. It's one of the most well-known Bible stories. In fact, our familiarity with it can rob us of its power! Look at the way we portray this story:

[Slide 2] Who knew hanging out with lions could be so much fun? Is Daniel telling them a story?

[Slide 3] Smiling lions. They're so cute. Does anyone else notice how white Daniel is in all of these? I don't think the artists realize he had a different ethnicity!

[Slide 4] Children's story books. Spoiler alert: I wonder if they include the part where the villains of the story are fed to the lions, along with their wives and children? You know, the part where the lions rip them to shreds before they even hit the ground?

[Slide 5] Veggie tales sang some songs about it. At least Daniel wasn't white.

[Slide 6, title slide] It's important to remember that when we read this passage, we aren't reading a child's bedtime story. Many of us have the advantage of knowing the ending; Daniel didn't. At this point in his life, he had seen many of his fellow Jews put to death. His people have been in captivity for decades. The danger was all too real.

If you remember where we left off last week, with Pastor Nate's sermon about the handwriting on the wall, there has been a change in power for Babylon. The old regime is out, a new one has entered the picture.

King Darius, the new ruler, began restructuring the government; placing 120 satraps in charge of the various satrapies, or districts. Daniel was one of three men put in charge of the satraps; a position he was so effective at that the King made plans to put him in charge of the whole kingdom. Which brings us to *Daniel 6:4 (NIV)*:

[Slide 7] <sup>4</sup> *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.* Could the same be said of us? No corruption? No gossip? No whispered comments about the boss? No cheating on tests? No bending the rules to get the job done? To make the sale? To get on the team? Daniel's reputation is incredible; decades of service and nothing could be dug up against him. <sup>5</sup> *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."*

The next four verses describe the plan they hatch; these leaders go to the King gushing about how incredible he is and how they all agree that he should issue an edict requiring everyone to pray only to him for 30 days. They don't want to outlaw

other gods; they just want everyone to take a break and focus all their prayers and worship on the King – and anyone who disobeys should be thrown in the lion’s den. So, King Darius, who apparently thought it was a great idea, put the decree in writing – making it binding and something not even he could overrule.

*[Slide 8] <sup>10</sup> Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows 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. <sup>11</sup> Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.*

They got exactly what they wanted; Daniel caught in the act. So, they go back to the King, acting all puzzled – “hey, King Darius, didn’t you publish a decree saying everyone has to pray to you or be thrown to the lions?” The King, probably thinking – yeah, it was your idea – says, “yes, I made that decree, and it can’t be repealed.”

The men essentially say, “oh wow, this is so awkward, but you know Daniel? One of those exiles from Judah – ug, they are nothing but troublemakers – well, Daniel doesn’t care what you say. He’s actually breaking your law three times a day praying to some other God!”

*[Slide 9] <sup>14</sup> When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him. <sup>15</sup> Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, “Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.”*

*[Slide 10] <sup>16</sup> So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!” <sup>17</sup> A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed. <sup>18</sup> Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.*

Lions are terrifying creatures. We don’t live in a world where they are a threat to us, so it’s easy to lose sight of that. In 2005, I went on a safari in Uganda; before entering the preserve, our guide laid out the rules. One of which was that we could never leave the vehicle; he explained that tourists are frequently injured or killed by the lions because they try to get out of the vehicles and take photos with them. There is a disconnect with the reality of the danger.

And we laugh at it; I would never be that foolish! Would I?

When I was 17 and living in Bolivia I went to a zoo. I'll never forget the lion cage; it was nothing like zoos in America. There was no safety moat, no reinforced glass. It was just a bunch of bars with large gaps between them and a bunch of lions. One of them, a massive lion, was asleep against the bars. I stood there transfixed thinking, "I'm going to touch that lion." I knew I wasn't supposed to. There was a sign saying not to. But I was only a couple feet away and how cool would it be to tell my friends I touched a lion? Yes, I had heard the stories about lions reaching through the bars and pulling people against the cage; but I would be fast enough. At about the moment I was going to do it, a truck pulled up and some Bolivian workers began throwing massive slabs of meat over the top of the bars into the cage; it was feeding time! These sleepy beasts who seemed so approachable, roared into life. Literally. They were catching the slabs of meat in air, fighting with each other, ripping the meat apart with their teeth and claws. It was a violent display of power. And I was shaking. Literally. I almost threw up. Confronted with their speed, their power, their ferocity, I was left a trembling mess as I realized just how narrowly I had avoided horrible danger.

The King couldn't sleep because he understood that danger. He knew the horror he had committed Daniel to.

As soon as dawn began to crack, the King rushed to the lions' den, calling out to Daniel to see if he was somehow, miraculously, alive. Let's be real; it was a ridiculous hope. And yet, Daniel's voice came up from the pit answering the king, saying that God protected him because he was innocent. The king was thrilled; scripture says he was "overjoyed." He had Daniel lifted from the den; apparently the punishment is what they would have called a trial – not an actual death sentence. In other words, if a person survived the night, then the gods, or in this case, the God, protected them then they must be innocent. In all reality; other than that time Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were protected in the furnace, everyone died.

Two things became crystal clear to the king through this; the first, that Daniel's God was real. Some have tried to suggest that the lions just weren't hungry – but that shows a lack of understanding about lions, and besides that – spoiler alert – we're about to see just how hungry they were. Secondly, the king realized he had been played by these advisors.

[Slide 11] <sup>24</sup> *At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. <sup>25</sup> Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth: "May you prosper greatly!*

[Slide 12] <sup>26</sup> *"I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever; his*

*kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. <sup>27</sup> He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.”*

There are two lessons that come through loud and clear in this passage. The first is that **[Slide 13] God is sovereign**. This is a theme repeated throughout scripture; the truth that God is completely in control.

*Psalm 97:9 (NIV) For you, Lord, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.*

*Job 42:2 (NIV) “I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”*

*Jeremiah 32:27 (NIV) “I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?”*

Nothing in this passage had the power to overcome God; not the ones scheming against Daniel and hungry for power, not the lions, not the pagan gods others believed in. God’s sovereignty comes through so loud and clear that a pagan king proclaimed His power to the known world.

The second lesson? **[Slide 14] Our lives are to proclaim God!** Daniel’s life proclaimed God in every way; they knew of his faith, they knew he prioritized prayer, there was nothing in his reputation to contradict his commitment to God. Daniel didn’t say yes to God just in death; he followed him in every decision – in his work, his home, his community.

April 20<sup>th</sup> will be the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Columbine school shooting. Two 12<sup>th</sup> graders killed twelve students and one teacher. Our nation was in shock; it was the first of what has since become too frequent a tragedy. I was a college student at the time and I vividly remember one piece of the story spreading throughout the country. The killers seemed to have targeted Christians; asking one at gunpoint if they still believed in God. When the answer was yes, they pulled the trigger. Groups of students around my Christian college campus were all asking the question, would we have answered yes? Many were adamantly declaring they were willing to die for their faith. It became such a thing that the dean of our chapel weighed in; pointing out that the incredible thing was not that this person was willing to die for their faith – but that their faith was such a known quantity that the killers knew to ask! The point was not the moment of death – the point was the witness in the days, months and years prior!

Would the people at your work know that you are a Christian? Do your classmates know? Would your neighbors say that you follow God? Daniel’s story challenges us to ask the question, what are we known for?

If the answer is no, what needs to change? Are you getting into the Bible? Praying regularly? Have you joined a small group or class – they can challenge you and help with accountability.

The sovereign God of the universe can transform each of us into men and women who serve and proclaim Him the way Daniel did through his words and his life.