

WHENEVER YOU FACE LIONS... – DANIEL 8:10-12, 16-23

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¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. ¹² So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: “Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions’ den?” ¹⁶ 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!” ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. ²⁰ When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?” ²¹ Daniel answered, “O king, live forever! ²² My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king.” ²³ The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Growing up in Africa had its perks. One of the perks of growing up there was going on game-park safaris. Because contrary to what many people think, wild animals do not just wander free across the plains of Africa. They have been driven off much of the land as people have laid claim to it. So the only wild animals you see in Africa are usually just in game parks. When you would go on a safari, you could go in an open topped jeep, with nothing between you and the wild (not for the faint of heart). There would be that nagging feeling in the back of your mind of what would happen if a wild animal attacked the jeep and the people in it. Fortunately, it never happened, but the guides did give us a good bit of advice in case it ever did. “You don’t need to outrun the lion, you just need to outrun one other person in the jeep.”

That was a wise saying, and hopefully a saying that would make you laugh. But there’s a more wise lesson we can learn. Because while the chances are pretty slim we would come face to face with a real lion outside of a zoo, we do face lion-like obstacles on a constant basis. These come in the form of spiritual temptations which want to maul away our faith. There is a wise lesson we can learn from our story of Daniel and the lions’ den. **WHENEVER YOU FACE LIONS REMEMBER TWO THINGS:**

1. Daniel Loved God's Word
2. Daniel Trusted God's Protection

(1)

It's a story that many, if not all of us, are familiar with – Daniel and the lions' den. But how did it all come about? Daniel was an Israelite that was brought to Babylon when the Babylonians conquered the promised land. But far from having a difficult life, Daniel was actually very well blessed by God. Because the Babylonians didn't just want slaves to do the manual labor of the empire, they also wanted the best and the brightest minds put to work to advance their empire. Daniel was one of those young and bright minds.

Daniel held a prominent position in the Babylonian government, and when the Persians took over, he retained a high position. Darius, the king, appointed 120 rulers to rule over all the portions of his empire. Over these 120 rulers, there were three administrators who would have direct contact with the king. Daniel was the chief of these administrators. You can only imagine what it would have been like for native born Persians to see a foreigner rise through the ranks with such ease. They resented Daniel. And so they looked for a way to discredit him. But they could find none, God truly was with Daniel.

And so, since they couldn't find a way to discredit Daniel, they had to make a way. That way was making a binding law. A law they knew would appeal to the vanity of the king, a law they knew would contradict Daniel's love for God's Word. They approached the king and presented the law. "What would you think if we made a law that for 30 days, everyone in the kingdom would have to bow down to you and none other?" Darius the king liked the idea, it showed his power, his might, and so he signed the decree into law.

As Christians, we can recognize the obvious sin of bowing down in worship to someone other than the Lord, the one true God. But we might try then to hide our faith, after all it's only for thirty days. But that's not what Daniel did. Daniel loved God's Word. Listen to the first verse in our story for this morning. **"Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room...three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before."** Did you catch that last phrase? **"Just as he had done before."** Daniel wasn't going to allow this decree to change his schedule. Daniel was still going to give witness to his faith. Because what message would Daniel be sending if he stopped praying out of fear of the law?

What Daniel did was not to spite the king. He didn't go out and flaunt his faith in a way he never did before. Daniel loved God's Word, just as he did before. In a way, you can see the compliment that Daniel's enemies gave to Daniel and his faith. They too knew that Daniel would not be dissuaded by such a decree. But now they could catch him in the act, he was breaking the law. Daniel was persecuted not because he nailed some theses up on a church door, but because he was praying.

God's Church has always faced persecution from those who are not a part of his church. We saw a little bit of that persecution in our second lesson for this morning in Galatians. In fact, the entire book of Galatians is Paul's letter to the congregation in Galatia to love God's Word. Love God's Word so much that you will not be dissuaded by these people that say God's Word is not enough, who say God's Word doesn't

save you. The Galatians faced pressure to conform to what others were telling them, thereby losing their freedom in Christ.

It is freedom we remember every Sunday in church, but especially today as we recall the Lutheran Reformation. In the 1500s, a monk named Martin Luther remained steadfast in God's Word, refuting any who would stand in opposition to what God's Word said. Now today, we don't have a ruthless king making a law to bow down only to him. We don't have a church which forces us to go against God's Word. We have everything laid in place to display our faith like Daniel, to be bold like Martin Luther.

It may be precisely because we don't have the threat of persecution that we don't display our faith as boldly as we ought. Maybe it's because we're ashamed of it, or ashamed of not knowing it as well as we ought. Maybe there are other things that get in the way of loving God's Word. It said in our story that Daniel took the time to get down on his knees three times a day and pray. These probably weren't quick "Thank you God" prayers either. When was the last time you took time out of your busy schedule and scheduled it for prayer? Now maybe you do, and that's great. But oftentimes when I find myself praying, my mind is not necessarily on what I'm praying about, but it's just another thing on my busy to-do list. The same thing can apply to taking time to read God's Word.

WHENEVER WE FACE LIONS, what is usually our first reaction? Our first reaction is to run. And when faced with the spiritual lions we face every day, running will only delay the inevitable, that the spiritual lions will eat you alive, they will tear you down. And yet when we love God's Word we find a different answer of what happens. Instead of running away from the lions, we run to someone. And that joke of not running faster than a lion but running faster than one other person is actually truer than you think. Because that one person that we must get behind is Jesus. He is the one person who took everything the spiritual lions could offer when he died for our sins on the cross. And it is his resurrection which guarantees our victory. God's Word leads us to run to him, not from the lions.

This is why we love God's Word, this is why, as the hymn stated we ask *Lord keep us steadfast in your Word*. Because when we separate ourselves from God's Word, we separate ourselves from God and from the protection he offers in Christ.

(2)

There's more to the story of Daniel than him just continuing to love God's Word, it's also that Daniel trusted God's protection. He knew as well as anyone the punishment for his "crime." He was brought before the king, and was cast into the den of lions. We aren't told what Daniel was thinking at this time, but a safe guess would be a similar thought to his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego. These men found themselves in a similar situation to Daniel, threatened with punishment for not bowing down to the king. They responded, **"The God we serve is able to save us from the blazing furnace...but even if he does not, we will not bow down."**

Daniel was sealed in the lions' den overnight. Meanwhile, the king couldn't eat, he couldn't sleep, he couldn't enjoy himself. He was concerned for Daniel. So he was the first one who was up in the morning to go to the tomb and cried down into the pit and asked, **"Daniel, has your God saved you?"** How relieved he was when Daniel's voice came up from the pit. **"My God sent his angel, and he shut**

the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight.” Daniel trusted God’s protection.

It can be very easy for us to look at the story of Daniel in the lions’ den or the three men in the fiery furnace and think this is the only way God protects his people. And that if God doesn’t protect you in this way, then he really doesn’t love you. This is a human way of thinking, not a God way. Those men believed in God almighty, all-powerful, and yet they also recognized they didn’t know God’s hidden will. What we do know about God’s will is that he wants all men to be saved, and he will hold his own firm in the faith. The way God protects us is line with his hidden will, sometimes he does it through a little bit of suffering – take a look at the Apostle Paul and all the lashings and beatings he got for being a Christian.

But remember our gospel for this morning. Jesus told his disciples, **“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.”** Why would our shepherd do that? The only reason that makes sense with what we know about Jesus, is that Jesus wants us sheep to rely completely and wholeheartedly on our good shepherd, to trust in God’s protection. He can allow hardship to remind us to rely on his protection. When God is protecting us there is nothing we need to fear – we don’t need to fear those who would make fun of us, we don’t need to fear those who can harm us, we don’t need to even fear not knowing what to say to someone about our faith.

God’s protection knows no limits. He protected us from our fate in hell by sending his Son. Jesus trusted God’s Word and protection so we can rest in God’s Word and protection. This is what Daniel trusted in, this is what Martin Luther trusted in, this is what you and I can trust in. **WHENEVER YOU FACE LIONS, REMEMBER TWO THINGS: love God’s Word and trust in his protection.** Amen.