

Darius: God Sovereign Over the Prowling Lion

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[0 : 00] I'm going to turn now to our Bible reading and once again we're with Paul, that is Paul Brennan, not the Apostle Paul, but we're with Paul in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament and that if you have one of our church Bibles you'll find on page 743.

Otherwise find Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and you'll find Daniel just after that. We're going to read together Daniel chapter 6, this very well-known story, famous story, but sometimes these famous stories we don't know quite as well as we think.

So let's read carefully, shall we, and see exactly what it is that the Lord is saying to us. It pleased Darius the king to set over the kingdom 120 satraps to be throughout the whole kingdom and over them three presidents of whom Daniel was one to whom these satraps should give account so that the king might suffer no loss.

Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him and the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom.

But they could find no ground for complaint or any fault because he was faithful and no error was found in him. Then these men said, we shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.

[1 : 34] Then the presidents and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, O king Darius, live forever. All the presidents of the kingdom, all the prefects and the satraps, the counsellors and the governors are agreed.

That the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction. That whoever makes petition to any god or man for 30 days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions.

Now a king established the injunction and signed the document so that it cannot be changed according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked. Therefore, King Darius signed the document and injunction.

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open towards Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he had done previously.

Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God.

And they came near and said before the king concerning the injunction, O king, did you not sign an injunction that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within 30 days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?

[2 : 51] The king answered and said, The thing stands fast according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked. And they answered and said before the king, Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.

And the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed. He set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored until the sun went down to rescue him.

And these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and the Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.

And the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you.

And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lord's, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel.

[4 : 04] And the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting. No diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him. Then at the break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions.

As he came near to where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?

Then Daniel said to the king, O king, live forever. My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they've not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him.

And also before you, O king, I've done no harm. Then the king was exceedingly glad and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den.

So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted his God. And the king commanded, And those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions, they, their children, and their wives.

[5 : 14] And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces. Then King Darius wrote, To all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth, Peace be multiplied to you, I make a decree that in all my royal dominion, people are to tremble and fear the God of Daniel.

For he is the living God, enduring forever. His kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues.

He works signs and wonders in heaven and earth. He who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Please do turn to Daniel chapter 6, which we read a little bit earlier.

Daniel chapter 6. Now Daniel chapter 6 is a great story.

[6 : 38] Perhaps the most famous of all Bible stories. And that is wonderfully gripping, isn't it? It's a graphic story. It captures the imagination. The tension mounts.

The pulse races. But let's be careful not to miss the real message of the story. Don't be so distracted by the lines you can see in the story that you miss the line you cannot see.

The danger Daniel saw in the threat of the lion's den was in actual fact inferior to the danger he couldn't see with his eyes. There was an unseen lion that was prowling and ready to pounce.

The apostle Peter in his first letter describes this lion. He says, Be sober-minded. Be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

There is an unseen but very real enemy set against God's people. As we've seen in recent Sundays in the book of Daniel, the living God, the God of Daniel, is the sovereign God.

[7 : 53] He alone is sovereign and he will have no rivals. Even the great kings of this world will have to reckon with that reality. First, as we saw, Nebuchadnezzar and then Belshazzar.

They were forced to submit to his rule. They were confronted with his sovereign reign. Now those were, in reality, small skirmishes in the great cosmic battle that has raged since Genesis chapter 3. And that is a battle that has only one outcome. Namely, the establishment of God's kingdom. His eternal kingdom to the very ends of the earth. But it's a battle that the devil himself will not give up. He is the great adversary of God's people. And here again, in chapter 6 of Daniel, he seeks to bring down God's man. The devil lurks in the shadows of this chapter.

He is the prowling lion. That was the lion that Daniel did see through the eyes of faith. And it was the lion that he, through his willingness to stand firm, defeated.

[9 : 07] His avoidance of the trap set by the invisible lion will ironically cast him into the den of very real lions.

This is a story all about the very real opposition and threat that God's faithful servants have always faced and will continue to face. But it's also an encouragement to God's faithful servant today to maintain faithful obedience to God, even in the face of the prowling lion, the devil.

It's an encouragement because our God is Daniel's God and he is the sovereign God. And so the devil and his attempts to bring down God's people, to take down God's plans, will in the end fall flat. Whether it's Nebuchadnezzar or Belshazzar or Darius. Whether it's the Babylonian Empire or the Median Persian Empire or any empire since, all these will fall by the wayside.

The kingdom of God alone will endure because he can and does deliver his people. Well, let's get into the story. We'll look at it in four scenes and seek to hear the lessons intended for the first

readers and the implications for us, you and I, here today.

[10:29] So scene one, verses one to nine. The ferocious opponents Daniel faced. The ferocious opponents Daniel faced. And we see here in these opening verses that God's faithful servants are an easy target for the enemy.

Now a lot has changed since we were last in the book of Daniel two weeks ago. Just two verses previous to this, Belshazzar was still on the throne.

The Babylonian Empire was still just about intact. But all that came crashing down at the decree of the living God. God stripped Belshazzar not only of his kingdom but of his very life.

And for Belshazzar it was all too late. And now Babylon is in the hands of another king, another empire. Darius now reigns over the extended Medes and Persian Empire.

Much has changed but there's one man who remains and it's Daniel. Now the king, Darius, he quickly sets about organizing his new government verse one.

[11:41] He puts in place 120 satraps and these would have been I suppose regional rulers, civil servants, local government officials and revenue collectors.

And over these satraps he set three presidents. I guess these were the secretaries of state. But of all these officials, Daniel stood head and shoulders above them all.

Look at verse three. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him and the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

Daniel shouldered significant responsibility, didn't he? And he carried out his duties with such diligence and dignity and integrity that the king was going to promote him.

He was going to make him the prime minister over Babylon. Now it's worth just pausing for a moment and noting how Daniel went about his work in a hostile environment.

[12:43] Now this isn't the key point of the text but it's worth just pondering. Remember Daniel, he is a Jewish exile taken from his home in Jerusalem, thrust into the very heart of Babylonian life.

Now Daniel didn't just throw up his arms and refuse to work. No, he used all the abilities God gave him. He worked hard. He served the authorities he's now found himself under.

But he didn't compromise. There were things that Daniel simply wouldn't do. But there was much he could do and did do. He worked very hard. He excelled.

He rose to the top because of his integrity, because of his capabilities. And you and I in our work, wherever that takes place, you and I are to be as faithful as Daniel was, with all the gifts and the abilities that God has given you, we are to use those.

And as the new Living Christianity course put together by the Christian Institute puts it, our success at work is defined by our faithfulness to whatever God has called us to do.

[13:51] Our efforts have meaning and significance, not because we necessarily know how they fit into the intricate tapestry of God's eternal work, but because we do know that God weaves them together according to his eternal purpose.

He uses whatever work we do for his purposes. So we work hard, don't we, wherever we are, wherever God's put us, whatever abilities he's given to you, work hard, be faithful.

Well, that was Daniel's attitude in his work in a hostile environment, and inevitably for him, it brought opposition. Look at verse four. The other senior officials, they were presumably jealous at the upcoming promotion that was coming Daniel's way, and they wanted to bring him down.

They wanted him out of the way. But the thing is, Daniel had not misled the House of Commons. There would be no resignation coming from his office. He was faithful.

There was no ground for complaint against him. They couldn't find anything. Unless, unless that is, they went for the one area they knew they could catch a mouth on.

[15:07] You see, God's faithful servants are an easy target for the enemy. Look at verse five.

Then the men said, we shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.

They knew that given the choice between faithfulness to God and faithfulness to Darius, they knew that for Daniel, faithfulness to God would always have to win out.

And so, if they could create a situation, if they could make a scenario where Daniel would have to make that choice, well, they knew they could catch him out. They knew they would have their man.

They would remove him from his office. And that is exactly what they do. Look on to verses six to nine. They come full of flattery to the king. Oh, King Darius, live forever.

All the presidents of the kingdom, all the satraps, the prefects, the counsellors and the governed, they are agreed. Well, that's a clear deception, isn't it?

[16:13] Where was Daniel in all of this? It's clearly not everyone who's in agreement. This preeminent civil servant has been left out of the discussion, but Darius can't see past the flattery. He never thought to ask, what does Daniel make of this?

What does he think? He can't see it through the flattery. They say, we all agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction that whoever makes petition to any god or man for 30 days except you, O king, unless they do that, they'll be cast into the den of lions. Daniel was on the receiving end of fierce, vicious opposition. They plot against him. They seek to bring him down. They not only want him out of their way, they want him dead, thrown to the lions. And they knew exactly what Daniel would do if a conflict arose between faithfulness to God and faithfulness to Darius. And so they create that conflict.

And that is often the pattern, the tactic of the enemy towards God's people. He puts in their path a choice, a choice of allegiance, either allegiance to this world or allegiance to the living God.

[17:39] I wonder, would we, would you and I make such an easy target for the enemies like Daniel? If our enemies were trying to find a way to catch us out, would they know to go for a similar line of attack that Daniel's enemies went for?

Would those who oppose you take for granted your unbending fidelity to the living God? Would that be an assumption they would make? Suppose the scheme was something like, just hold off church attendance for 30 days.

Just take a month off. Would you think twice about that? Is there enough evidence of your faithfulness to God to trouble the enemy?

Would he know where to strike you? It was clear for Daniel, wasn't it? They knew exactly how to get him. Is it as clear for you and I, I wonder?

For me? It's a probing thought, isn't it? You see, if you're not really a faithful servant, if you're just a casual bystander in the Christian life, then this doesn't really apply to you.

[18:52] The enemy has no need to take aim at you. You're no threat to him. But if you are a faithful servant, not perfect, but faithful, if you are a faithful servant, then be prepared to stand firm against the attacks that might come.

Be prepared for that moment of choice between loyalty and allegiance to God or loyalty and allegiance to the world. Well, that's the first scene, the ferocious opposition that Daniel faced.

Let's look on to scene two, verses 10 to 13, the faithful obedience Daniel maintained. We see here that God's faithful servants will persist in faithful obedience.

Well, the trap has been set, the legislation signed. What would Daniel do? Well, look down at verse 10, and this really is the key moment in the whole chapter.

You see, the point of trust, the point of victory for Daniel was not on the precipice of the lion's den, but rather it was here, in the solitude of his upper room.

[20:11] This is where the battle was really won. Look there at verse 10. When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house, where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem.

He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed, gave thanks before God as he had done previously. Daniel was fully aware of the plot against him.

He knew the document had been signed. He knew the consequences of what he was about to do. He knew in all probability that he was being watched. He knew that this for him probably meant the end.

He knew he'd be thrown to the lions. But he had no expectation that God would save him. Of course he knew that God could.

God could deliver him. But there was no expectation from Daniel that that would be the case. Daniel was prepared to persist in his faithful allegiance to the living God.

[21:17] He knew the choice he faced and he stood firm. He stood firm against immense pressure. All were against Daniel. The power and intimidation of the full state machine was against him.

The secret police were no doubt outside watching, keeping an eye. Great, great pressure. How tempting just to close those windows. How tempting just to think, hey, it's only 30 days, what harm can it do?

But no, Daniel knew that his God was the sovereign God. And so the only thing he could do was remain loyal to him. This is the turning point in the story.

This, here, verse 10, is where the battle was won. As one preacher put it, the real miracle is not that Daniel got out of the lion's den, but rather that he was thrown in in the first place.

That's right, isn't it? So often the real miracles are not spectacular. Regular, ongoing, unspectacular obedience to God, that is the arena of real miracles.

[22 : 29] That's the real miracle here in Daniel chapter 6. It was that in the face of great opposition, certain death, the real miracle was that he prayed anyway. So when we watch Daniel being lowered there into the lion's den, we hold our breath, don't we?

We anticipate what's going to happen. Yet by that point, the real danger had already passed. The real danger had already been overcome by this point. The great battle had been won.

The great fight had been fought. As we said at the start, Daniel saw the greater danger. He knew where the real battle was to be fought.

He knew that the devil was trying to destroy him and destroy his witness. And so he was willing to be thrown to the lions because that would mean escaping the jaws of the unseen lion, the prowling lion, the devil.

His willingness to be thrown to them meant he escaped the unseen lion. And that for Daniel, well that was the point of victory. That decision to pray regardless.

[23 : 37] And that is so for you and I today. Your greatest victories in life are not at the point of God's deliverance, but rather at the point of decision. Do you obey God and his word?

Submit to him or do you go with the way of the world? Do you submit to the world? Do you go with the flow? That's the key decision. Where does your loyalty rest when that moment of decision comes?

Christians in every age have suffered and even died because, like Daniel, they refused to compromise their allegiance to the living God. The Apostle James says, Submit yourselves therefore to God.

Submit to him. Resist the devil. And he will flee from you. That was Daniel's stand. He resisted the devil. Will it be yours and mine?

Will we take a stand like that? And resisting the devil, it may mean being thrown to the lions. But that is, from eternity's perspective, better by far.

[24 : 49] Seen from this world, it's a tragedy. But from eternity's perspective, from the real perspective, that is better by far, to resist the devil, be thrown to the lions.

But note too, that little phrase at the end of verse 10. Daniel prayed as he had done previously. Test. This was Daniel's well-established habit of prayer.

And by this point in the book, it is likely that Daniel is in his 70s or even in his 80s. It's quite a thought, isn't it, that only once Daniel got to his 80s that his greatest test came.

Daniel had faced plenty of tests before. Just read the opening chapters of the book. He's faced test after test. And we can, I think, tend to assume that the great tests in Christian experience come in the early days.

But that may not always be the case. So if any of you here are in the first eight decades of life, then this applies to you.

[25 : 55] It may be, it may be that the sternest test lies ahead. Daniel knew that all that had happened already in life, they were a preparation for this moment.

But rather than view this as a moment where he could opt out of faithfulness, relying on past faithfulness, no, he saw this as the climax of faithfulness. As St.

Clair Ferguson put it, past faithfulness was not meant to be a compensation for present faithfulness, rather, it was a preparation for more faithfulness. So yes, we've had, as a fellowship, as a church, stern tests in the last decade or so, but there will no doubt be more to come.

All that's happened in the past, is a preparation for what's to come next, for what yet might be.

Perhaps personally, you've faced great tests in your life, in your faith, but there may be more yet to come.

All that's happened already, all those moments of past faithfulness, their preparation for what might yet be. Well, that was Daniel's experience, and it's been the experience of countless Christians down through the ages, and it may so be for you and I.

[27 : 19] So we've seen here then, the second scene, that God's faithful servants will persist in faithful allegiance. So scene one, verses one to nine, the ferocious opponents Daniel faced, scene two, the faithful obedience Daniel maintained, and scene three, the futile obstruction Darius attempted, verses 14 to 18.

And we see here that God's faithful servants do sometimes suffer unfairly, so put not your trust in the powers of this world. Well, the trap has been set, and it works.

They've caught their man in the act, and they triumphantly bring the news to the king in verse 13. And Darius, well, he now realizes that he's been caught out.

The man that he trusted, the man he was going to make prime minister, has been subject to the most vicious campaign, motivated by jealousy and hatred.

Look at verse 14, the king is absolutely devastated. And he did what he could to obstruct his own decree. He worked until the sun set to deliver Daniel, but he couldn't do it.

[28 : 39] His efforts were futile. And like Herod and Pilate after him, Darius would find himself having to condemn an innocent man, to hand him over to certain death in order to keep face.

To placate the crowds who were baying for blood. And the treatment that Daniel was on the receiving end of here, it was utterly unfair, wasn't it? He had been set up, he had done nothing wrong.

And the legislation was totally deceitful and designed to catch him out. Desperately unfair. And sometimes God's faithful servants will suffer unfairly.

like Daniel, like John the Baptist, like Jesus himself. All innocent. All found guilty under trumped up charges.

And there is no use when those moments come, there's no use putting your trust and hope in the powers of this world. Even the great Darius, who realized he'd been caught out, who wanted to rescue Daniel, he couldn't.

[29 : 48] He couldn't deliver Daniel. He was utterly powerless. Look at him there in verse 18. He couldn't eat. He couldn't sleep. He was wracked with guilt about what had befallen Daniel.

And it may be that the rulers of this world are not personally hostile towards you. They may even favor you, but don't pin your hopes on them. They may be as helpless as Darius was.

And although Darius couldn't deliver Daniel, God could and did. Even the most powerful of this world's institutions are men.

They're powerless compared to the living God. So here's the lesson. Don't put your trust in men. Trust in God, for he alone, as we see now in our final scene, he alone delivers.

So let's look on then to that final scene, verses 19 to the end. The foolish opposition exposed by Daniel's deliverance. And so we see here in this last scene that God's faithful servants need not fear the powers of this world because God saves.

[31 : 06] Well, morning breaks and Darius rushes to the lion's den in the morning. And he, like the reader, is none the wiser at this point. What has happened to Daniel? Is he still alive?

Would he know the temporal deliverance that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego enjoyed decades earlier? Daniel's eternal deliverance can be in no doubt, can it?

He remained faithful to the end, even under the most intense scrutiny. But would he survive the lion's den? Darius cries out, O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you?

Then comes the reply that Darius longed to hear. O king, live forever. My God sent his angel. Shut the lion's mouth.

I've not been harmed because I was found blameless before him. Daniel is delivered. Not a scratch was to be found on him.

[32 : 09] And he was delivered, end of verse 23, because he trusted in God. That moment in verse 10, when he prayed on regardless, that moment of trust, that is what delivered him.

It wasn't because the lions weren't hungry. Look on to the next verse. It's a very sobering and gruesome verse, isn't it? Daniel's adversaries, those who sought to trap him and bring him down, they themselves, well, they're caught in their own trap.

They're thrown to the lions. And before they even reach the bottom of the pit, the lions overcome them, they destroy them. So it wasn't that the lions weren't hungry, it was that the living God delivered Daniel.

And this shows us, doesn't it, the utter foolishness of opposing God and God's people. There's a total mismatch going on here. Despite having the full weight of the Persian empire behind them, Daniel's adversaries were trapped by their own plan, total ironic.

And that is how it will be for all God's enemies if they continue to oppose him, to oppose his church and his people. And it may be for those who oppose God and his people, it may be that they will face defeat in this life like these guys do.

[33 : 31] But if they don't face the reality in this life, then they certainly will on that awesome day of judgment, that will surely come. Man's foolish opposition will be exposed one day.

And so you and I, we can know that none can harm us as we stand in Christ, because he has defeated through his death, his resurrection, our greatest and most fearsome opponents, our great enemies have been dealt with.

Those things that we fear most, they have no hold over us in the end. And that is not to say that we are guaranteed to avoid hardship.

There's no guarantee that we'll avoid suffering or even death in this life if we take a stand like Daniel did. But this life is not all there is. And so the deliverance that Daniel knew, all who trust in Christ, all who trust him will know that deliverance to one day.

It may not be in this life, but certainly on the day of Christ, when he returns, we will know that deliverance. We will know without a doubt the deliverance that Daniel knew.

[34 : 49] It's a sure thing. And on that day, the great powers of this world, the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians, the powers that strike fear into your heart and mine, they will be seen for what they really are on that day.

And they will be powerless, utterly powerless, in the face of the living God, who is the king of the universe. God will deliver his people on that day.

And it's a deliverance that has been won because Jesus Christ, one more innocent than Daniel, one who was found guilty and trumped up charges, one who had not put a foot wrong, he wasn't kept from the grave.

He wasn't spared the agonies of an execution. But as one writer put it so well, the jaws of the lion could not and did not halt it.

And the stone was rolled away to show a greater miracle than the preservation of Daniel, to show that death had already given up its prey. Christ overcame death.

[36 : 03] And this is God's way of deliverance for his people. The innocent suffered, defeated death once and for all so that the guilty may go free.

The only truly innocent man that ever walked this earth. He wasn't spared the judgment that rightly should come to us. And that is why you and I can stand firm today.

Even against the fiercest opposition, even the full weight of the state, when they're arrayed against us, you and I can stand firm.

Not because we're particularly courageous, but because of God's sure promise of deliverance. It's sealed. Sealed in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our God is a saving God, a God who delivers those who trust him. And as we trust him, as you trust him, we know that nothing, nothing can touch us, not death, not the devil, nothing can touch us.

[37 : 15] In him alone, we have the certain hope of everlasting life. so the prowling lions that we will inevitably encounter at some point in life, the lions that we can see and the lion that we cannot see, they need not strike fear into our hearts because we know, we know that there is one who has delivered us from their grasp.

he's done it. It's a sure thing. So trust him. In Christ alone, our hope is found.

He is our light, our strength, and our song. Amen.