

In the Lion's Den

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- [0 : 0 0] Our gracious Father, we thank you that you continue to speak to us through your word. And it's your word that has saved us as it told us the news about Jesus and his death for us.
- It's your word that continues to grow us as we are reminded about who you are and what you've done for us. And so as we come to your word, Father, we pray that you would give us ears to hear and minds to understand.
- But more than that, that you would help us by your spirit to live it out. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, I've got an egg here.
- I've got it just carefully wrapped because it's not hard-boiled. And I'm wondering whether I can get someone to see if they can... Actually, Ali, do you reckon you can catch it from here? All right. You ready?
- Okay. You ready? Go. Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Now, the reason I did that is because that's what our kids did us one day.
- [1 : 0 1] They bought this rubber egg from school, which looks very real. I'm not going to catch that. Oh! And we were in the kitchen and they got together. They plotted to prank us. So Michelle and I were there.
- And they said, oh, catch mum and dad! Whoosh! And we freaked out. Some other kids plotted to prank their parents, but this time their parents plotted to prank them back.
- So on the next slide, the parents bought a box of Krispy Kreme donuts, put it on the table and said, kids, come and get it. And then when the kids came and opened the lid on the next slide, that was all vegetables and fruit.
- Gotcha. Gotcha. Now, plotting to prank someone is usually just a bit of fun, provided it doesn't go overboard. Kids, my kids, don't go overboard.
- But when it comes to plotting to persecute, it's a whole different story, isn't it? And it's happening in our world. There are people who are plotting to persecute Christians.
- [2 : 0 0] So for example, over the last couple of years, the American Atheist Society, on the next slide, has been putting up these billboards. So this is 2015. Dear Santa, all I want for Christmas is to skip church.
- I'm too old for fairy tales. I'm not sure they've worked out the irony of that. Fairy tales and it's writing to Santa. Hang on a sec. So that was 2015. And then, sorry, you can go to the next slide, Tech.
- This, they tapped into President Trump's campaign to make America great. And this was last year's one, make Christmas great again, skip church. And so there's a real concerted effort to try and push people away from God.
- Or in June, just this month, on the next slide now, in Malaysia, Malaysian Islamic organizations rallied together to pressure the government into banning evangelical Christianity.

It hasn't worked, but here is another group of people plotting together to persecute Christians. Or on the next slide, in China, just last month, the government said that members of the Communist Party must abandon all religious beliefs or be punished.

[3 : 07] Now, in China, 88 million are members of the Communist Party because if you are, your job prospects are much better. And so now, if you want to be a Christian, you have to leave the Communist Party, which means your jobs are in jeopardy.

In fact, if you've got your bulletins here, you just suddenly have to look at the back of it. And our mission spot this week is for the persecuted church. And there's a whole heap of examples. In India, anti-conversion laws are now in force.

In Uzbekistan, a recent family was raided, and now they're facing punishment. There are people plotting together to persecute Christians.

Closer to home, there was a Christian event last September in a McCure hotel in Sydney where Christians were coming together to talk about the whole same-sex marriage debate. And protests were rallied outside. People were gathered to protest.

And they started to grow violent in Sydney, in Australia. And so the hotel cancelled the event. Last Friday, it was Purple Day, where some workplaces and even some schools were encouraged to wear purple to promote the whole LGBTI agenda.

[4 : 15] And the government knew there would be pressure on people to conform. And so one of the MPs actually issued a statement in the newspaper, The Australian, to say, you know, we shouldn't put pressure on people.

But on the next slide, this is the next one. This is the way the Australian put it. Where at Purple Day, dissenters must not feel ostracised. Now, the quote is from the MP, but notice how the media has put it.

Anyone who disagrees with this worldview is called a dissenter. You know what another word for a dissenter is? A rebel. So if you disagree with this view, you're now regarded as a rebel.

And you can see it in the media with politicians all saying vote in the postal plebiscite. And you see boxes that have tick yes in it with a tick in the yes box. Has anyone ever seen a box that's ticked no? No.

So here are different examples of people working together to lobby the government or against the Christian worldview. And in some cases, groups plotting together to actually persecute Christians like in Malaysia.

[5 : 16] So how are we to respond? We've been hearing some lessons over the past few weeks in the book of Daniel. And as we come to chapter 6 today, we'll see another lesson. Because in chapter 6 today, we see some people lobbying the government or rather the king to plot and persecute one of God's people, Daniel.

And as we work through the chapter, we'll see how Daniel responds and why. But first, the plot. So we're at point one in your outline and verse one in your Bibles. It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel.

And the satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss, you know, loss of revenue or taxes and so on. Now, Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

Now, this, the administrators and 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 or faithful and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally, these men said, look, we'll never find any basis for a charge against this man, Daniel, unless it has something to do with the law of his God.

[6 : 37] Here in verse one, we meet a new king. It's a new part in history. The Persians and Medes are two nations that formed one empire and they've taken over Babylon.

And the first king is a king called Darius. If you've seen the movie 300, this is that was the Persians and so on. Not particularly nice movie, but anyway. Now, the history we have and even some of what we've got in the Bible tells us that this king, Darius, was probably also the same king, Cyrus, because it's also recorded in the history books that Cyrus conquered Babylon.

In fact, over the page in chapter six, the last verse, if you just have a look there for a moment, verse 28 over the page. Cyrus is mentioned in Daniel's book as well, and the two seem to be used as interchangeable names.

And in verse 28, it says, so Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius. And the word and in the Hebrew or the Aramaic as it is here, it can also mean that is the reign of Cyrus, the Persian.

And you've got a footnote there which says the same thing. And so we're probably dealing with the same person. Either way, this king does what most kings of that time did. They appoint their own governors.

[7 : 49] Governors, you know, like we have premiers over our states to help rule the country so that the king and the prime minister might not suffer loss of revenue taxes and the like.

And there might be order. And just like with Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel is again recognized as a clever cookie such that he's made a premier, if you like, of a state.

He's made a governor. In fact, during the first year of Darius's reign, Daniel is so good that the king plans to promote him to be like a deputy prime minister over the whole kingdom. And verse three says it was because of his excellent or exceptional qualities.

The phrase is literally because he had an excellent spirit in him. In other words, we're reminded that Daniel's abilities come from God. You remember in the earlier chapters, it kept saying the spirits of the holy gods are in you, Daniel.

Well, it's again another reminder that all his abilities come from God and that God is using Daniel, working through him to accomplish his purposes, to encourage his people and to remind us that God both rules and rescues.

[8 : 54] But the other satraps are jealous of Daniel's success and pending promotion. And so they want to take him down. But notice Daniel is so faithful in all he does. They can't find any charge against him.

Unless they find fault with his faith in the law of God. Verse four. Now, I think there's a lesson there for us. You see, we have to live such good and godly lives that people have no reason to have a go at us except for our faith in God.

My first car was a blue Corolla. Great car. I bought it off a teacher at my dad's school. My dad taught with him. Dad was a math teacher at a public high school. And I was talking with this teacher in the car.

I'll take it for a test drive. He was sitting in the passenger seat next to me. And he made this comment. Dad wasn't there. It was just us two. And he said, yeah, your dad's a good man, except for all the church stuff he does. Now, I didn't know what to say at the time.

I wanted to buy the car. But thinking back on it now, I thought, what a compliment for my dad. The worst thing that this guy could say about dad was that he was a faithful Christian who served his church.

[10 : 04] Not bad. And can I say, with this same-sex marriage vote coming up, I'm sure the tensions will increase. And there may be times when you have conversations with family members or work colleagues or others, perhaps at school or university.

Whatever happens, we must make sure that our manner and speech are gentle and loving. So that the worst people can say is, you believe the Bible.

I mean, that's not an insult. That's a compliment, isn't it? By the way, I need to say as your pastor that if you are a Christian, then the right and loving thing to do is actually to vote no. After all, the loving thing to do is to uphold what is good for people.

And the Bible tells us what is good for people. What is loving? What's more, the government wants to know what we think, hence the postal survey. But when it comes time to talk about it, we must make sure we do so gently and lovingly so that the worst people can say is that we believe the Bible.

I mean, they'll use it different words to say that. They'll say you're bigoted or intolerant, which they're actually being at that point. But you get the idea, don't you? Daniel is so faithful that they have to find fault with his faith in God, in the law of God, the word of God, in other words.

[11 : 25] And so they concoct this plan, don't they? Verse 6. So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said, Oh, may King Darius live forever. It's a standard greeting if you're appearing for a king.

The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisors and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any God or human being during the next 30 days, well, except to you, your majesty, shall be thrown into the lion's den.

Now, your majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed. And so the king Darius put the decree in writing.

Now, notice in verse 6 that the satraps and the narrator lists all these groups of people, but this time they all come together as one group to petition the king.

I mean, that's remarkable in itself, really. Can you imagine all our politicians and state premiers from all the different political parties coming together in unison to lobby the prime minister over one issue? In other words, it's an unnatural alliance to bring Daniel down.

[12 : 31] And notice the way they also appeal to the king's vanity. I mean, what king doesn't want to be treated like a god? Pray to you only. And so the king signs this new law, which cannot be reversed.

And so now we have this law, which is in direct conflict with God's law. God's law, which says there's only one God to pray to. First commandment, if you like.

And so again, the issue of who rules is raised. Does King Darius and his Persian law rule? Or does God and his law in the Bible rule?

Well, Daniel knows which one. So he chooses to remain faithful to God and his law in Scripture. Point to verse 10. Now, when Daniel learned that the decree had been published and become law, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows open 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. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking for help.

[13 : 39] Now, these two verses are worth pausing over for a moment because they teach us a few things. First, you might think that because Daniel prays with the windows open, he's like deliberately sticking it to the satraps.

That he's going out of his way to kind of put it, rub their faces in it. But he's not doing that. At the end of verse 10, do you see there? The end of verse 10 tells us that this is what he had always done before.

He's not going out of his way to rub it in their face. This is what he's normally done. In fact, in verse 11, the satraps, the group actually had to go and find Daniel praying. So it's not as though Daniel is deliberately flouting his prayer and asking for persecution.

Rather, he's praying with the windows open towards Jerusalem because that's where the temple was, where God promised to dwell. That's his way of praying to God. Second thing to notice is that he does remain faithful in prayer, doesn't he?

In other words, he breaks the king's law in order to remain faithful to God's law. When it comes to state-sponsored law that compromises our faith in God, then the Bible says we must obey God rather than men.

[14 : 49] And so Daniel prays towards Jerusalem to God as he's always done. But the third thing to notice is kind of another little lesson for us, I guess. You notice he prays regularly, doesn't he?

Three times a day, as he's always done. Now, the Bible doesn't say that three times a day is the magic number, but it does say that we are to pray regularly and often in all circumstances.

For prayer is one of the ways that we exercise our trust in God. You know, when we pray, we're saying, we can't do it. We're relying on you. We're trusting you. We're depending on you. We're asking you for help.

We exercise our trust by prayer. In fact, Jesus himself often went off to pray to his father for help, to be faithful. And so no wonder Daniel has been able to remain 70 years in this foreign land and still remain faithful to God.

He prayed regularly. Our Kingdom Growth Prayer Night is coming up in a couple of weeks' time. Not this Wednesday, next Wednesday. I know prayer is easier for some than others. I'm by nature a doer.

[15 : 51] So pausing to pray is hard for me. I want to get out and do things. But then I always remember, or God reminds me, I suspect, that prayer is doing something.

And so I have to force myself or discipline myself to pause and pray for me and for you, which I do. For it's God alone who gives us help to remain faithful to him. That's what Daniel does.

Verse 11 again. Daniel was praying and asking God for help, you see. Of course, the satraps now think they've got him. So, verse 12. They went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree.

Did you not publish a decree that during the next 30 days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, your majesty, would be thrown into the lion's den? And the king answered, the decree stands in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.

Then they said to the king, well, Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, your majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.

[16 : 56] And when the king heard this, he was greatly distressed. He was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him. Now, notice firstly in verse 12, the shrewdness of these satraps.

They don't tell the king about Daniel straight away, do they? They first get the king to affirm his law, which is very clever. And then they drop Daniel in it.

You see, they knew the king liked Daniel. I mean, he was going to promote Daniel. And so they first corner the king so that he's got no way out. I said to my Bible study group last Thursday, you can almost hear those reversing bips, you know, the bip as they maneuver the king back into the corner by this cleverness, this shrewdness.

And having worked out that he's been duped, the king spends the rest of the day trying to find a way to save Daniel. But he cannot. You see, for all his power as king, he has no power to save.

He's even a slave to his own law and custom. And so at sundown, we read in verse 15 that 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.

[18 : 14] So the king reluctantly, no doubt, gave the order and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lion's den. The king said to Daniel, May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you.

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.

Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating, without entertainment, and he could not sleep. It's interesting here, by the way, that at this stage of the story, Daniel is in a den, which is very much like a cave or a tomb.

And in verse 17, a stone is rolled over the mouth of the tomb. Does that remind you of anyone else? But Daniel doesn't stay there, for as we find out, or as we've heard already, God rescues him from his would-be grave.

So we're at point three in your outlines and verse 19 in your Bibles. At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lion's den. 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?

[19 : 33] Must have been a surprise for the king. Daniel answered, May the king live forever. 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 done anything wrong before you, your majesty.

You see, verse 20, the king says, Was your God able to rescue you? And Daniel's answer, Yes. Not a mark on me.

But notice, just like in chapter 3, God does not rescue Daniel from having to go through the persecution. He doesn't rescue him from having to be in the lion's den.

But rather, God rescues Daniel through the persecution, through the lion's den. God was with him by his angel, just like God was with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace with the fourth man, remember the angel.

You see, God is with his people in our trials and brings us through them to life again. And by rescuing Daniel, God also turns the tables. He shows that Daniel's faith in God's law or word was right and that the satraps were, well, sadly wrong.

[20 : 46] Verse 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.

At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lion's 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.

Notice that the tables are dramatically turned. Twice we're told that Daniel was lifted out of the den, out of his would-be grave, which again sounds familiar for someone being lifted or raised from the grave.

But the point here is that by rescuing Daniel, God shows that Daniel was right to trust in him, in his law, in his word. And on the other hand, the satraps end up in their own trap as a no doubt embarrassed and angry King Darius sentenced them and their families to death.

You see, by rescuing Daniel, God turns the tables. But God also, by rescuing Daniel, shows that God is a God who rules and rescues.

[22 : 10] Do you see verse 25? Then King Darius wrote to all nations and peoples of every language in all the earth, May you prosper greatly. I issue a decree that every part of my kingdom, people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

For or because he is the living God and he endures forever. His kingdom will not be destroyed and his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves.

He performs signs and wonders in heavens and on earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions. Just like King Nebuchadnezzar did in the earlier chapters, King Darius also proclaims to all the nations that God both rules and rescues.

He says that Daniel's God, his kingdom and dominion will never end. In other words, God always rules. And then Darius says three times that God rescues or saves.

You see, because of God's rescue of Daniel, Darius now declares to every person that Daniel's God, our God rules and rescues.

[23 : 18] And so the message of this chapter for the Jews in their foreign land is clear, is it not? In the face of plotting and persecution, remain faithful to God's word.

For God rules and rescues his people. And this message is the same for us today as we live in our foreign land of this world, where people lobby the government to change laws.

In some countries, people actually plot together to persecute Christians. We are to remain faithful for God both rules and rescues his people. Now, I realize this is a similar message to what we've seen before, particularly in chapter three with the fiery furnace.

But it's hard to remain faithful when the pressure's on, isn't it? It's hard when groups cleverly lobby the government to change laws against Christianity, like in Daniel 6. It's hard when your work or school organizes days like last Friday and pressures people into joining in.

It's hard to remain faithful. And so that's why God repeats the message. And we're going to see it repeated again and again throughout this book so that we might continue to be encouraged and remain faithful to God who both rules and rescues his people.

[24 : 34] Of course, this rescue is sometimes to life in this world again, like it was for Daniel or like on the next slide for this guy called Brendan. Brendan was one of the founders of the Firefox Internet Explorer.

So if you don't know what that is, that's the one. So if you've seen that symbol on your computer, Brendan was one of the co-founders. He helped establish the company. He was also the CEO of the company. But then in 2015, he was forced to resign by his board because he supported the traditional view of marriage in the U.S.

around the same time the law was up for being changed. You see, groups lobbied the board of his own company and he was forced to resign. But he remained faithful.

And in June this year, so just a couple of months ago on the next slide, he started up a new Internet browser and he raised \$35 million in under 30 seconds. It's extraordinary.

Talk about being rescued through his persecution to life again in this world. Now, that's an extreme example. Please don't mishear me. God doesn't promise us \$35 million in 30 seconds, to be clear.

[25 : 41] But you get the point, I think. Sometimes his rescue is to life in this world again. But other times, God's rescue of his people is to life in the world to come.

You see, I alluded to the fact that Daniel points us to Jesus. There are lots of similarities. I mean, the enemies of both Daniel and Jesus could find no corruption in them. Same as Jesus at his trial. Both the enemies of Daniel and Jesus conspired together.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees and here the Sad traps and so on. They conspired together. They both petitioned the authorities. You know, the King Darius or the Governor Pilate. Both of them were faithful to God, even to the point of death.

Both of them ended up in a den or a tomb with a stone rolled over the top. And both were lifted out of the den or tomb. Lots of similarities. The big difference, of course, is that Jesus actually did die.

And then was raised to life again. But because Daniel points us to Jesus in all these ways, we are reminded that God rescues his people sometimes to life again in this world, like Daniel.

[26 : 49] But other times to life in the world to come, like Jesus, through a resurrection. We saw the same thing with Paul in our second reading. So on the last slide there, on the next one. Thank you.

From 2 Timothy 4. Listen to what Paul said. He said, Now just keep that slide up for a moment.

And notice a couple of things. First, again, like Daniel, Paul acknowledges that God was with him through his persecution. The Lord stood at my side. And second, like Daniel, God rescued Paul from the lion's mouth.

And we think that's probably literal. I mean, the emperors in those days often fed Christians to the lions. And he rescued Paul from the lion's mouth to life again in this world. But third, notice verse 18.

Paul also knows that his rescue may one day be, and as it turns out, this was his last letter to Timothy, may be to life again in the world to come.

[28 : 04] Or as he puts it, his heavenly kingdom. And finally, notice that Paul is determined to remain faithful so that the message of the gospel might be proclaimed.

And last line, God might be glorified. You see, whether it's a rescue to life again in this world or a rescue to life in the world to come, we are to remain faithful to God, for God is one who rules and rescues his people.

And we are to remain faithful with God's help so that people might see us as different, hear the gospel, and glorify God. Just as King Darius did in Daniel chapter 6, just as Paul did from his prison cell, probably in Rome.

Let me finish with a couple of examples. I met a man this week who left his country a little while ago because the country made it illegal to convert from Islam to Christianity. And so it was actually his father who said, you better leave the country for your own safety.

And so he did. I won't tell you which country because this talk's being recorded. But he came to Australia and within a few years, he just shared the gospel and how he became a Christian.

[29 : 10] And he now has a church of over 200 in Dandenong, of people from his own country who've converted to Christianity just through his ministry. He was chatting to me. He was asking about whether we could help hold a Bible study here during the week because apparently there's lots of people from his nationality here in Doncaster.

But anyway, he got a message because the secret police back in his home country found his brother over there. And when they found him, they smashed his legs, broke several bones in his legs, and then sent a message to him here in Australia saying, stop preaching the message of Jesus.

Otherwise, more of this will happen. And his brother said, keep going, remain faithful. Or take someone in our own church. Last Friday was Purple Day, as I mentioned, which used to be about raising support for epilepsy, actually.

But anyway, but now it's supporting something else. And in workplaces, there was lots of encouragement for people who wear purple and so on. And we've got someone from our own congregation who felt the pressure, but decided, you know what, I'm just going to remain faithful.

He was still loving and gentle in the way he spoke to his work colleagues, but he was willing to stand out as different. And he just went about quietly remaining faithful to God. I don't know what the next few years are going to hold for us here in Australia, and I don't want to, you know, be an alarmist.

[30 : 35] But whatever happens, we're to remain faithful to God, because God rules and rescues his people. Let's pray. Gracious Father, we pray that you would help us, because it's hard to stand firm and to remain faithful.

So please do help us by your spirit to remain faithful to you when there are times of persecution, whether it be with extended family or the workplace or even at school.

Help us to remain faithful, remembering that you are a God who rules and rescues his people. And when it is hard, help us to remember the example of Daniel. Help us to remember the example of Paul.

And most of all, help us to remember the example of the Lord Jesus. Help us to consider Christ and the way that he endured persecution and remain faithful to you. We ask all these things in his name.

Amen.