

EASTER SUNDAY - Vindication!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 April 2011

Preacher: Andrew Reid

[0 : 0 0] Friends, let's pray while you remain standing. Father, we do pray again this morning that you would teach us wonderful things from your word, that you would soften our hearts, that you'd transform our wills, and that you'd loose our tongues, that we might respond, hear your word rightly, and respond to it rightly.

And we ask this for the glory of your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen. Well, friends, as we get underway today, I want to just set the context for what I'm doing.

In our 6pm services here at Holy Trinity, we have been doing a series of Bible talks on the cross. And we decided that we'd try and integrate these into our Easter services.

And the theme that we've got to today is vindication. And when I was thinking of this, I chose two passages. The first was from Daniel 6, and the second is from Romans chapter 1.

I am going to reflect on both of those passages today, and also reflect on the Gospel accounts of the death and resurrection of Jesus. However, I'm going to start in the unusual place for Easter Day.

[1 : 1 0] That is, I'm going to start with Daniel 6. We're going to spend a reasonable amount of time there, so I'd encourage you to open your Bibles at Daniel chapter 6. So if you're looking for it there, the page number is 723.

So 723. Now let me set the context for you. The book of Daniel is set in a very dire time for the people of Israel.

They are away from the Promised Land. They are in trial and tribulation in Babylon, in exile. And the focus of the first six chapters of the book of Daniel fall on four young men.

Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel. And these four young men in the succeeding passages, especially Daniel, seem to outlast the great Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, and even the evil Belshazzar.

And in chapter 6 they find themselves facing another king. Chapter 5 verse 31 identifies him with Darius the Mede. And one of these new king's moves is to decentralise government in his land.

[2 : 1 6] 120 satraps are appointed. Three presidents are appointed over them. And one of those men is Daniel. So he occupies a very significant position of leadership within the land.

And Daniel 6 tells us that in this leadership he distinguishes himself yet again. For in verse 3 we're told that the king moves to promote him even further. And the other court officials, well, they become somewhat jealous at this it appears, and they have this cunning plan put in place.

You see, these courtiers know that Daniel is a righteous man. They know he's not corrupt, so they cannot get at him this way, but they also know that he is a man of God.

And so they work out a scheme whereby they might play off Daniel's loyalty to the king against his loyalty and devotion to God. And this cunning plan has a good chance of success.

After all, as you can see, as we read, it bargains on the king's arrogance. And what it does is take advantage of his desire to unite his kingdom.

[3 : 19] But more than that, their scheme sandwiches Daniel between two laws. On the one hand, the law of this Medes and the Persians, and on the other hand, the law of God.

And they, these courtiers, bet on a certainty that if Daniel has to choose, he will choose to side with God's law. And so they put a proposal, you can see it there in verse 6, and the king, understandably and as expected, succumbs.

And he proclaims his edict, that is to be put into force, and that all that is needed now is for a conviction. And it's not long in coming, you see, because Daniel hears of the decree, he goes about his normal daily routine, and part of that routine is his prayer life.

And so he goes at the normal time of the day to pray, and as he does, he faces towards Jerusalem, and I presume he praises God for his grace in the present, and prays perhaps for the promised future salvation that we know from chapter 2 will come from Jerusalem.

And in other words, he does the predictable. He does what he's always done. He engages, though, you've got to understand, in some civil disobedience. Why? Because he has a greater allegiance to God.

[4 : 29] He breaks the law of the land three times a day, because he is under a greater law, the law of God. He has no choice, but it seals his fate.

Now, friends, let me just explain a little bit what's going on here. You see, I want you to notice again where Daniel is facing. He is facing Jerusalem. Now, why would you face Jerusalem? Is it just because he's got some sort of sentimental attachment to what is now a pile of rubble?

No. It's because he knows God's future comes from Jerusalem. That represented the once powerful nation, but he's praying toward it not because of that, but because it is the city of God.

It is the city from which God's kingdom will come. So to not turn toward Jerusalem would have been to neglect his future. It would have been to neglect God's future. It would have quenched his vision.

It would have killed his spirit. It would have destroyed his soul. It would have taken out of him the man of God, as it were. Daniel had no choice. He got down and he prayed daily, three times a day.

[5 : 33] Jerusalem, you see, made Daniel who he was. It gave him his very reason for existence, and he would not hide it, no matter who was looking. And his conspirators knew this would happen, and they approach in verse 11 and they find him praying and they return to the king and they trap Daniel just as had been expected.

They trap the king also, though, with his own law because he's proclaimed this law, which is the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be changed. And look at verse 13. They spring the trap shut.

Then they responded to the king. Well, Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah, well, he pays no attention to you, O king, or to the interdict that you have sown. He's saying his prayers three times a day.

And at this point, anguish, distress, seizes the king. He likes Daniel. He knows Daniel's a good man. He determines to release Daniel, but the officials, well, they hold on.

They hold rank and they come before the king. Look at verse 15. Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and the Persians that no interdict or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.

[6 : 40] Now, you see, the king's ensnared at this point. He's caught. He's entangled in his own decree. And there are two victims here. There is on the one hand the king and the other Daniel, and they lay squirming under the courtier's envy.

And the order goes out and Daniel's brought and he's thrown into the lion's den. Now, lions are very well known in the ancient world, not in this part of the ancient world any longer, but they were part of the sport of kings.

We know this because we've got stories about it and pictures about it. Kings loved hunting lions, but some of them kept their lions for other purposes. They didn't kill them.

They put them in dens and they starved them and they used them as a way of carrying out judgment on their opponents. And Daniel knew that he knew God. And Daniel knew that he would not give up that knowledge, even if it meant facing the gaping, foul-smelling jaws of a lion.

However, there were some surprises in store for him, weren't they? You see, the starving beasts didn't tear him to pieces that night. Instead, they lay down with him.

[7 : 46] Isaiah had promised a future day of salvation when lions would refuse to be, to take the part, act the part of carnivores, but it happens a bit early with Daniel here. In the same way as they'd refrained from violence on one day on Mount Zion, they neither harmed nor destroyed on this night.

And Daniel's not the only one who had some surprises. You see, I want you to notice here in verse 16. Do you remember the interdict from the king? Well, he prays.

And he prays to another god. He breaks his own law. And then he hurries to the lion's den. In verse 20, he calls out. He confesses the power of Daniel's god. He says, O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your god whom you faithfully serve been able to deliver you from the lion's mouth?

And Daniel's voice echoes back. It's polite, full of courtly protocol in verses 21 and 22. And look at it. O king, live forever.

My God sent his angel and shut the lion's mouth so that they would not hurt me. Because, you see, I was found blameless before him. And also before you, O king, I've done no wrong. Can you see what Daniel's saying?

[8 : 52] It's unequivocal, isn't it? You see, what he's saying is, I've done, God has rescued me and he's done so for two reasons. He's done so because I'm blameless. And he's done so because of his servant's faith.

And so in the lion's den, Daniel is vindicated. It's as though God is saying through the closing of the lion's mouth, Daniel, you've made the right choice. You are vindicated.

And you are kept free. Not only that, my law is vindicated. My law is the law and therefore I am vindicated. You see, the real point of this incident and of the story as a whole is this.

Daniel is vindicated. He is righteous and he is innocent. Two, the law of God is vindicated. It is a real law worth obeying.

Three, God is vindicated. He's the greatest God, greater than this king and greater than this king's gods. Now look at verses 26 and 27. Darius says, Four, he is the living God enduring forever.

[9 : 53] His kingdom shall never be destroyed. His dominion has no end. He delivers. He rescues. He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth for he saved Daniel from the power of the lions.

And all that remains now is for the loose ends to be tied up and in keeping with Persian practices, death and punishment for courtiers and families is carried out. And the fate that was planned for Daniel becomes their fate.

And then Darius issues another decree acknowledging the overarching kingship of Daniel's God. And Daniel prospers again. Now friends, I just want you to notice some things about this passage and then we'll reflect on some New Testament perspectives.

I wonder if you can see a number of patterns here. There are some clear patterns within this passage. Point number one is, belief in God costs you something. See, no matter where you are in the world, if you want to believe in a real God, then you're living in a world set against a real God.

It inevitably will cost you something. Point number two. Third, the presence of God for those who have fidelity to God is assured at all times. To be faithless to us would be to deny himself.

[11 : 02] Third, God will vindicate himself and his servants. You see, we are in relationship, if we believe in God, in the true God, we are in relationship with a real and living God.

And he is bound to us. And he will vindicate himself as the real God and us with him. And the fourth point is that God will rescue. Now I just need to be a bit careful here. You see, next time you're caught in the mountain, you know, thrown into a lion's den, I'm not sure that God does promise through this text that he will rescue you.

But what I think he does promise is that he will be with you. That is, and finally he will deliver you from that great and most awesome of all predicaments, death itself.

That is, not necessarily physical death, but that second death, that distance from him and relationship with him. God will finally rescue us from the great enemy which Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced, death itself.

So let's put all of this together. What's the overarching message of Daniel 6? It is, God is faithful. He will never leave or forsake those who are his. He is for them.

[12 : 16] But there are other significant things in this passage. And, uh, I want to say that what these, this passage gives us is a pattern for how God, for the people of God, how, what will happen to them in the world, a pattern for the world, a pattern for the activity of God.

And this sort of pattern that we see in Daniel 6 is confirmed in the life of Jesus Christ. I want you to think about it for a moment. Think about Jesus, the gospel stories, the similarities between Daniel 6 and what we read about in the gospels.

Can, can you think of some of the similarities? Think for a moment. Jesus, we know, is faithful to his relationship with God and to the task God has given him.

Caiaphas, the chief priests, the religious authorities, they take advantage of him, don't they? They decide that they will trap him by bringing fidelity to his own mission, into conflict with other laws and customs, knowing which one he will choose.

They do this out of envy, we are told. Later, they report his messianic claims, throwing him to open conflict with the state. Jesus is also betrayed by those who are close to him.

[13 : 28] Like Daniel, on the eve of his arrest, he does what all the saints of God do in such situations. He prays, Matthew 26. When Jesus is brought before Pilate, Pilate, this king sympathises with him at his plight as much as he is able.

He recognises his innocence and works for his release. On the cross, a centurion and a thief on the cross also sympathise with him, recognise his faithfulness and his innocence.

Nevertheless, nevertheless, Jesus pays the cost for his faithfulness to God, doesn't he? He is sentenced. He is sentenced to death. He is mocked.

He is executed. He is thrown into a tomb, Matthew 27. However, did you notice the difference? He is not rescued. On the contrary, God appears to have abandoned him, as we saw last Friday.

Because of his bearing of our sin, the promise of divine presence in suffering is apparently withdrawn. However, after three days, he is vindicated. And that's what we celebrate today.

- [14 : 33] Because of his innocence and faithfulness, God brings him back to life. Jesus is vindicated. God is vindicated. God's purposes are fulfilled and vindicated. And the course of history demonstrates these patterns.

The faithfulness of the people of God to their God will always be taken advantage of. It will often bring them into suffering. But it will always bring them to vindication.

The faithfulness of the people of God will always be met by the faithfulness of the faithful God. He is God. By nature, He is faithful.

He delivers. And this pattern has always been followed. It will always be followed. Jesus knew it. Jesus expected it. He waited for it. He counted on it. Now, Daniel's emergence from what looks like a tomb in Daniel 6, therefore, is a symbol of resurrection.

Jesus, you see, is the wise man who rises from the dust of the earth to everlasting life and who shines forever like the brightness of the heavens, just as the saints do in Daniel chapter 12.

- [15 : 45] The resurrection of Jesus, friends, is the vindication of Jesus and of God. The resurrection of Jesus proves that Jesus is the Son of God.

That's what Paul means in Romans 1 when he says Jesus was declared to be the powerful God by the resurrection from the dead. But the vindication of Daniel and of Jesus is also a symbol and assurance of our ultimate rescue and vindication.

It is the guarantee that God will eventually do with us what He does with Jesus. He will finally vindicate and rescue us in a similar resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus that we celebrate today is a guarantee that death has no sting. It is not a place of defeat but of victory.

We've tried to capture this in our cross here today. You see, if you were here on Friday, it had a crown of thorns at the top. Today, it has flowers and a symbol of life. You see, to recognize that resurrection, that the death of Christ is not the end.

- [16 : 56] Resurrection is the guarantee that death has no sting. Listen to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 54 to 57. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true.

Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Friends, I want to close by just making the point that these patterns are not just patterns for some past age.

They are patterns for us to do, for us as well. And they're designed to actually be goads to us. They're designed to make us faithful and immovable and give us confidence in being that.

So you heard that in 1 Corinthians 15. Verse 15, verse 58 says, we should always give ourselves to the work of the Lord knowing that our labour is not in vain.

- [18 : 02] But I want you in your Bibles to pick up your Bibles and read Hebrews 11. Have a look at Hebrews 11. So Hebrews 11 tells us that like all people of faith, we are like Daniel to look to the future, longing for a better world, a better country, a better city.

Look at verses 8-16. It says, we're to live in the Babylons of our world with our eyes and our prayers fixed to another city, another city which has foundation, whose architect and builder is God.

You see, just like Daniel in one sense, we're to face that new city. And then verses 33-34, we're to maintain the faith. We're to line up with the great ones.

And notice what he says here, those who by faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, gained what was promised, who shut the mouths of lions, who quenched the fury of the flames, who escaped the edge of the sword and whose weakness was turned to strength.

Surrounded by such witnesses as we have seen, we're to throw off everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles us and run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

[19 : 15] We are, as chapter 12 of Hebrews says, to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

And he goes on, consider him who endured such opposition from sinful people so that you might not grow weary and lose heart. But I want to close with one other verse.

If you're in Hebrews there, flip just a bit further toward the back to 1 Peter chapter 5. Now 1 Peter chapter 5 is addressed to people just like those in Babylon, Christian people just like those in Babylon and Peter urges them to act as God's people in a world set against them.

In chapter 4 he says, be ready to suffer and don't be surprised when it comes. And then in chapter 5 he finishes off with some comments which seem to have a definite reference to Daniel 6. Can you see them there from verse 8?

He says, humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand that he might lift you up in due time. cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert.

[20 : 25] Listen to the next echo of Daniel 6. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Resist him. Firm in faith because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

and the God of all grace who called you into his eternal glory in Christ after you've suffered for a little while will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

To him be the power forever and ever. Amen. Friends, I wonder if you can hear what's going on here. Faith, humility, godly living, they are essential to the Christian life.

Courage, loyalty to God, a confident Christ-like focus or a Christ-would focus and a God-would focus are fundamental ingredients of Christian living and they must be part of our make-up.

Friends, please understand me. Christianity is not a game for wimps, not for the effete. No, being a Christian throws you into a battle and it brings you under threat from all quarters.

[21 : 39] And these passages urge us to stick at it, to be obedient at all costs. But friends, the resurrection of Christ from the dead tells us something.

You see, it says, God will vindicate you. The vindication of Jesus which we celebrate this day in the resurrection guarantees it.

God may not always do it in this life for you, but he will vindicate you. God is sovereign. God has vindicated his son.

He has done it through the resurrection from the dead and he will vindicate all the faithful of his people and he will forever defeat the forces of evil.

He will conquer them and what we remember this day is both promise and guarantee. Friends, this is not just any day in the calendar. This is resurrection day.

[22 : 47] This is day of vindication. This is day, the day when we can say that resurrection, that vindication is mine for I have lined up with him on the cross and I have lined up with him in his resurrection and God will vindicate for God is faithful.

That's what this says. God is faithful. God will vindicate. God will remember. This day is promise and this day is guarantee. So let's pray together.

Father, we thank you that this day we remember that you vindicate your servants. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross and whom you highly exalted and you have bestowed on him the name that is above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

We thank you that in this deed of raising Jesus you promise that you will vindicate, that you are sovereign, that you will forever defeat the forces of evil.

We thank you for this day and its promise and guarantee we thank you for this in Jesus' name. Amen.