

## Daniel: Living By Faith in the Real World In the Lion's Den

by Senior Pastor: Bill Couch  
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This morning we conclude our series of messages entitled Living by Faith in the Real World. Daniel lived 600 years before Jesus. Israel had been conquered by the Babylonians. The King of Babylonia, Nebuchadnezzar, had a policy of bringing young leaders from the nations he conquered to Babylon. He sent them to a school where they were indoctrinated in the beliefs and culture of Babylonia. He hoped this would assimilate them fully into the Babylonian way of life. Upon successful completion of the classes, they would be sent as leaders back into the provinces so they could assist in assimilating others. Daniel was one of the young leaders who went through this school. He graduated at the top of his class and became a ruler.

During the incidents described in our text, Daniel is now 80 years old. He has served under several different kings. The newest King Darius has appointed him as one of the highest rulers in the land. Other leaders were jealous of Daniel and conspired to have him removed from office. They could find nothing on Daniel. They came up with another angle. Knowing that Daniel faithfully worshipped the God of Israel, they convinced Darius to issue an order that anyone who prayed to any god or man except him would be thrown into the lions' den. Daniel ignored the decree and continued praying to God three times a day. The jealous men reported his behavior to Darius who was very distressed. He tried to figure out a way to rescue Daniel because he liked him. But, to save face, he had to carry out his decree.

### Daniel 6:16-23

So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"

<sup>17</sup>A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. <sup>18</sup>Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

<sup>19</sup>At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. <sup>20</sup>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?"

<sup>21</sup>Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! <sup>22</sup>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."

<sup>23</sup>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.

How do we live as a believer in one God in a world that has many religions, gods and moralities? We can learn a lot from Daniel about how to live in such a world. The Babylonian empire was a pluralistic society much as our own. When the Babylonians conquered a nation, they gave them freedom to continue worshipping their own God or gods as long as they would recognize the validity of all other gods. It was the same concept of tolerance that our society advocates today. All beliefs are true and valid. No one can claim that their god is the only god. This created a problem for Daniel and other Jews who believed in only one Creator God. It creates a problem for us today, since Christians also believe there is only one Creator God and that Jesus is the way to connect with that God. How do we live out our faith in the real world?

Daniel provides a model for how to live in a pluralistic society. He is a concrete illustration of what Jesus proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said we are to be salt in the world. We will experience persecution by the world. And we are to be the light of the world. Daniel experienced all three.

Jesus said we are to be salt. By describing us as salt, Jesus warns against isolating ourselves from the world. There were some Jewish people in Daniel's day who separated themselves from the Babylonians and would have nothing to do with them. There are some Christians today who separate themselves from the world and only go to Christian activities and work only in a Christian environment. As pleasant as that makes life, it is not what Jesus called us to do. He called us to be salt in the world—to have an impact on the world. Daniel was salt in the Babylonian world. He went through the assimilation classes and learned all the Babylonian beliefs. He cooperated but without compromising his faith. He rose to one of the highest levels of

office in the land. He was in a place to influence many people and to share his faith.

He was described as honest and hardworking. He was an effective and exceptional leader. In the prophecies of Jeremiah, God spoke to the exiles who were carried into Babylon. He told them not to isolate themselves from the Babylonians, but to engage fully in the life of the city. They were to cooperate but without compromise. They were to work for the peace and prosperity of the city.

Daniel engaged the city without being assimilated. Daniel served as a ruler under the authority of the Babylonian kings. Yet, everyone knew of his faith in the one God of Israel. He prayed at a window in his house three times daily. He did not try to hide his faith. Daniel worked for the prosperity of the city. He was salt in Babylon.

Salt is distributed. It goes out and then it goes in. It is effective. Daniel got out into the Babylonian world and engaged in it. Jesus went out into the world. He not only went to the places of worship, he went to weddings and parties and among the poor and the people with leprosy. Salt is a preservative. Today we primarily use it as a spice to bring out flavor in food. But in the ancient world it was used to preserve food that would otherwise go bad. Jesus told us to be salt in the world. We are to go places that otherwise would go bad and impact those places with God's presence and love.

We are not to get assimilated by the world. We are to impact the world for good. We need Christian people as leaders in business, government, art and education. I think we do a terrible thing to young persons in church when we seem to indicate that if they are really spiritual, they will become missionaries or ministers. Daniel had the gift of prophecy. He could have been a full-time prophet. Instead he chose to be salt. He trained in a secular school and landed a secular job. He had a great impact for the Kingdom of God and influenced the kings of Babylon. As a

prophet he never would have had the contacts he had as a government official. Young persons, you are not a second class citizen in the Kingdom of God when you enter a secular vocation. You are fulfilling Christ's command to be salt in the world. If we are salt, we will be engaged in the real world.

If we engage the real world, we will be persecuted and hurt. Daniel was an example of one who engaged without being assimilated. There are some Christians who engage the world but are so accommodating and embracing of the world that they are no different from the world. They are fully assimilated. No one can see a difference in them.

There is always a tension between the world and believers who are living as salt in the world. Daniel experienced this. When the king promoted him over all the other leaders, some became jealous. They tried to dig up dirt on Daniel. They thought surely he was like them and had done some shady deals. But they could not find anything that he was doing wrong. They discovered he operated with integrity—he was not like them at all. There is something about the world that considers Christians strange because they live differently from the world.

They plotted to kill Daniel because he was not like them. He was honest and devoted to the peace and prosperity of the city—not to his own success. The only way his enemies could get rid of him was to use his faith against him. They appealed to the vanity of the king. They suggested that he issue a decree that for 30 days persons could pray to no other god or person than the king. He issued the order. They knew that Daniel was a man of faith who would not compromise his worship of God. Daniel continued his daily practice of praying at the window. They were waiting to catch him and turned him in to the king. The king was fond of Daniel and realized this was a set

up. He tried to rescue Daniel, but once a Babylonian king gave a decree it was irreversible. He had no choice but to throw Daniel into the lions' den. He even fasted and prayed for Daniel to survive. He came early the next morning hoping to find Daniel alive. Sure enough Daniel comes out unharmed. He says to King Darius:

"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." Daniel 6:22

The point of this miracle is often missed. Many believe the point of the story is this: "If you are good and do what is right, God will take care of you and keep you from harm." That does not fit with the rest of the Bible or our experience. People who are innocent are persecuted and hurt. Jesus was totally innocent—more so than Daniel—and yet he was beaten, whipped, tortured and executed. When he came out of the cave, his forehead was scratched. His wrists and ankles had nail holes. His side had a spear hole.

The story of Daniel in the lions' den points to the salvation of the future. Miracles in the Bible are never naked displays of supernatural power. Jesus never said, "Watch this" and then caused a mountain to erupt into a volcano just to demonstrate his power. He used his powers to heal the sick and feed the hungry. When he performed a miracle, the blind could see, the lame could walk and the hungry were fed. Miracles are not just suspensions of the natural order. They are restorations of the created order. They demonstrate the way God intended things to be. The miracles reveal what the world was like at creation—when all things were created good. There was no sickness or hunger or death. The miracles reveal that God is working to restore his creation even now. They show what life will be like in the new heaven and the new earth. The Apostle John describes it this way in Revelation:

“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. The one seated upon the throne said, I am making everything new!” Revelation 21:4,5

Daniel surviving the lions den is a miracle foreshadowing the prophecy of Isaiah that in the new earth the lion will lie down with the lamb. (Isaiah 11:6,7) In the Psalms roaring lions are the symbol of the disharmony in the world—suffering and danger. When God shuts the mouths of the lions around Daniel, it is a miracle showing that God has power to restore nature and overpower conflict and death.

Daniel announced to the king, “My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions.” Notice that God did not rescue Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego before they were thrown into the furnace. God did not rescue Daniel before he went into the lions’ den. He allowed them to enter these places of danger and death. He demonstrates that his power is not just to rescue, but to overcome. Jesus came into our world. He went into the lions’ den and was ripped to pieces. A stone was rolled over the entrance to the burial cave and sealed with wax just as a stone was rolled over the lion’s den and sealed with wax. But God raised Jesus from the dead to overcome death once and for all. We can go through sickness and financial struggles and loneliness because we know that Jesus went into the lions’ den to experience suffering with us, and he overcome it. Hurt is going to come even when we do good in the world. But the miracles of the Bible show us that even if we are ripped to pieces, God will overcome through giving us resurrection and life.

Daniel was engaged in the world and the world persecuted him. And at the same time, Daniel was light for the world. Jesus said, “You are the light of the world.” When we live a life of faith in the real world, some will be offended and persecute us.

But others will be attracted by the grace and joy with which we live because we know a God who has power to overcome all things. What a glorious opportunity we have to live like Daniel and Jesus in the world. We can be salt that engages the world. We can be light that attracts the world to God. And we know that even when we are persecuted, God's power can overcome. If we are not attracting and offending people by the way we live, then we are failing to engage this world. We are not living like Jesus. In what ways are you living by faith in the real world?