

How to Tame Lions

Daniel 6:1-28

**A Sermon by Dr. Calvin Warpula
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A few years ago, an editorial in *Fortune*, a respected secular magazine, asked this question: “Why so much unhappiness, unrest, and violence in the midst of so much material abundance? Why the low morale. . . the sense that things have gone wrong?” The writer then answered his own question: “All of these phenomena are related in one way or another to a single underlying condition—the loss of what might be called the invisible means of support, the inner resources that in earlier generations lent purpose to people’s lives, connected them to the social order, restrained their conduct, and helped sustain them in adversity” (*Fortune*, April, 1974).

Our story today is of a man who possessed this “invisible means of support,” “the inner resources” that gave purpose to his life, molded his conduct, and sustained him in adversity. From this man we can learn the secrets of living happily in a stress-filled society.

Our story is about God’s man, Daniel, who served the Lord faithfully for over 68 years in a pagan, foreign land. By this time, Daniel was no youth, but an octogenarian of some 83 years old. This reminds us that age is no barrier to usefulness. Caleb was 85 when he conquered a mountain and the enemies who possessed it. Moses was 80 when he led Israel and did so for the next 40 years. It’s always too early to write your obituary.

In 605 B. C., Daniel had been taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians. Daniel lived the rest of his life in Babylon. In 539 B.C., Cyrus, King of the Medes and Persians captured the capital city of Babylon and the Babylonian kingdom was no more. Cyrus’ governor, Darius the Mede, ruled the city of Babylon. Daniel had served the Babylonians as a kingdom administrator and Darius likewise appointed him to a place of power. Because of his faith, devotion, courage and commitment to God, Daniel was sent to the lions den to be eaten by lions, but God delivered him. This drama is a great inspiration for us today as we face our own lions. Let’s look at Daniel’s story today as it is told in the book of Daniel, chapter 6. We’ll follow the familiar story and notice applications for us today.

I. Daniel’s Rise to Power (6:1-3)

Darius, of course, headed up the government, but three administrators served under him. Daniel was one of them. Then there were 120 governors to rule the land.

Daniel was so well-prepared, professional, efficient, honest, reliable, and ethical that the king intended to promote him higher—maybe even to Prime Minister of the entire country.

Isn’t it good to see God’s people excel—people who are Christian through and through and who practice their faith daily?

II. The Jealous Opposers Plan Daniel's Fall (6:4-9)

The other administrators and rulers were jealous of Daniel, even though he had done nothing wrong to offend them or to hurt them. These opposers checked him out thoroughly and could find absolutely nothing in his professional or personal life to condemn.

The only thing they could fault was his spiritual life—it had to do with Daniel's faith and service to God.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if that's all that people could find wrong with us?

Daniel had done nothing to irritate these people. They were evil—they loved darkness. Throughout the Bible, wicked people have tried to destroy the righteous. It started with Cain and Abel. We see it in Saul and David. Then, of course, it's present in the Jewish leaders and Jesus of Nazareth.

What do people today say about Christians? Some might look at us and say that we are full of pride, i.e., that we think we are better than others. Others might say that we are lazy, i.e., that we don't work but that we sit and do nothing. Others might say that we are hypocritical, i.e., that we speak one way and act another. But wouldn't it be wonderful if all they could find against us was that we "served God faithfully"?

The other rulers appealed to the king's pride. They told the king that everyone should pray only to him for thirty days. This would enforce patriotism and unify the kingdom. It would force everyone to unite behind the king and look to him only for spiritual guidance and strength. The rulers got the king to agree that anyone who prayed to another God would die. Without thinking, and without thinking at all, of his good friend, Daniel, the king signed the executive order. It was a rule among the Medo-Persians that once a law was written that no one, not even the king himself, could change it. This is emphasized three times here.

These jealous rulers now had an official law and order rule that no one for the next thirty days could pray to any other god than the king himself. It was a bad law—a law made to destroy the faithful of God. The devil is at work here. Satan works in the brothels and dens of lust and liquor, but he also works in conservative law and order as well.

What should a believer do? What would you do if you were told not to pray for thirty days? Would it change your life or would it be business as usual because you don't pray that much anyway?

What would Daniel do? Let's see.

III. Daniel's Faithfulness to God (6:10-11)

Daniel's custom was to pray three times daily (morning, noon and sunset) every day. He communed with God. Even at noon, in the middle of his work day, he came home to pray. He was not "too busy to pray." He was "too busy not to pray."

He prayed with his windows opened. He did not hide himself. He did not hide his prayers. He did not try to push them on others; neither did he try to conceal them.

He prayed toward Jerusalem even though he had not been home in 68 years. The temple of God and his homeland were there. Solomon had mentioned praying toward Jerusalem (I Kings 8). Jerusalem reminded Daniel of home, of release from captivity, and of the coming Savior (the kingdom in chapter 2 and the many prophecies of chapters 7 through 12).

He prayed on his knees. When a posture of prayer is mentioned in the Bible, this is the most prominent one. He was dependent on God.

He gave thanks to God and asked for help. He praised God for his blessings. He sought God's intervention. He knew the stakes. He knew that others might be watching but he prayed any way. He had rather die than not commune with God.

He did all this "just as he had done before." The king's rule was subservient to God's rule. Daniel did not change his practices to please his contemporaries.

We might argue with Daniel to try to save his life. "Daniel, pray with the windows shut or pray silently in a closet." But Daniel did not do that. He was not a man who served God only when there was no price to be paid. The world is happy if we practice our religion on the reservation. But we cannot be silent. Faith must be real in the world, daily—not just in a church building weekly.

We might say, "Daniel, just quit praying for a month." But Daniel did not do that. He knew his strength to serve came from private communion with God. If our acts of prayer are the most regular things in our life then we will find that they will regulate everything else.

We cannot depend on spiritual revivalism in public worship to increase our communion with God. If we do not have it in private, we will not go very far in public. Public worship should be an out flowing of private worship. In order to do this, we may have to have less time in front of the television, less time in bed or less time reading the newspaper or novels.

We all have as much of God in our lives as we want. How much do you want God in your life? How much time do you spend with him in prayer, meditation, love, reading his word, worshipping, and fellowship with him? To answer my own question, I would say, "Not enough."

The devil came to Jesus. Jesus quoted Scripture three times (Matt. 4:1-11). This is the only thing the devil listens to. We resist the devil by saying "No" to his temptations. We learn how and why to say "No" from listening to God.

We pray, like Jesus taught us, for the glory of God, before we pray for anything else. "'Hallowed by your name, your kingdom come, your will be done" (Matt. 6:9-10).

IV. Daniel Is Thrown to the Lions (6:12-18)

The evil rulers spied on Daniel's prayer life and reported him to the king. The king was greatly distressed and gave all day to attempting to find a loophole in the law. No loophole could be found. The evil rulers reminded the king that no law of the Medes and Persians could ever be changed. So Daniel was thrown into the den of lions.

A stone was placed over the opening and the king's seal placed on it so that it could not be changed.

Darius cared for Daniel. Amazingly he said, "May your God, whom you serve continuously, rescue you." He wanted Daniel to be saved.

The king had no food, no entertainment, and no sleep that night. We could make a movie of this event and call it "Sleepless in Babylon." Daniel among the lions slept better than the king in his own bed with bodyguards and security.

V. Daniel Is Rescued from the Lions (6:19-23)

The king arose early, ran to the pit, and cried out in fear, hoping for the best, but expecting the worst. "Daniel, has your god rescued you?"

Daniel replies, "O king, God has delivered me. He has shut the lions' mouths because I was innocent in his sight." God controls the moods, appetites and mouths of lions. The lions obey God but humans often resist him.

Daniel was lifted from the pit. He was rescued because he believed in God. He did what was right no matter what the cost. "Faith and duty" were more important to him than life and security. Daniel defied the law of the land because the law was against God. Daniel stood his ground in a secular age. This is the most important thing in life. God wants us to stand our ground for him. This is an evil world. Satan is alive and plodding the earth. The books, magazines, newspapers, movies, music, and television are largely controlled by worldliness, selfishness, humanism and secularism. The biggest problems among youth today are drugs, violence, guns and knives, theft, pregnancies and suicide. Among adults, violence, drugs, theft, greed, and corruption in high places are major problems.

The secular press laughs at Christians. It criticizes strong religious values. It labels those who stand up for purity and right living as "fundamentalist Christians." The academic community often laughs at the idea of God creating the world. Anyone today who believes that God created man in his own image and defends a biblical view of creation will often not be hired or published.

Environmentalists who try to save the planet are applauded but those who try to save a baby in its mother's womb are often derided. The world's values today say that anyone who destroys a bald eagle in the nest will be fined \$5000 but anyone who takes a baby's life in its mother's womb only gets a ho-hum and a shrug of the shoulders.

In a world like ours, more than anything else, we need to stand our ground like Daniel. We must not let our contemporaries or our culture shape our convictions. We must be people of God, dependent on God, who live for God openly and unashamedly. The hardest word in the entire world to pronounce is the two-letter monosyllable, "No." We need to say "No" to Satan and the world.

We face lions today. There will always be more lions than Daniels. We face the lion of laziness, the lion of dishonesty, the lion of cheating, the lion of immorality, the lion of compromise, the lion of pride, the lion of popularity, the lion of financial collapse, and the lion of family problems. Our God is the same today as he was in the time of Daniel. It is never right to do wrong. And it is never wrong to do right. Daniel prayed. He trusted in God. He may, too, like us, at times, have been frustrated by evil and its increasing power. He may have wondered what God was doing, but he did right, no matter what. He stood his ground.

Our duty is to stand our ground in this age of worldliness and secularism. We cannot control the world, governments, other people, or even, gas prices, but we can be true and faithful to God in the midst of everything. We can pray. "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." "The prayer of a righteous person avails much" (James 5:16).

In the 1940's, Vincent and Margaret Crossett were missionaries in mainland China. They struggled against poverty and paganism in a remote village to tell others about Jesus. Although the work was slow and painstaking, after much sacrifice a small church (more like a simple Bible study) seemed almost established. But right on the threshold of this small triumph for the kingdom of God, Satan began his prowl. When the Communist Chinese government inaugurated the Cultural Revolution of 1948-9, all foreign missionaries were forced to leave the country.

How the Crossetts hated to leave. Their fledgling flock of believers hardly seemed ready to stand the coming onslaughts. An atheistic, dictatorial government began its rule with ruthless power. How could the little church survive? From a worldly perspective there was nothing anyone could do. The church appeared destined for extinction. But Vincent and Margaret do not

see as the world sees. They saw no reason to despair because, through eyes of faith, they saw a God who is faithful to those who honor him.

The Crossetts continued to do their duty. The walls of China went up but the Crossetts prayed. For nearly forty years the Crossetts daily kept their prayer windows opened toward China. They did their duty in the faith that God could triumph though an institution of sin had swept the land like a mighty river. The Crossetts heard nothing of their Chinese friends for four decades, but still they dutifully prayed for God to be victorious in the church they left behind.

Finally, the wall came down again. The ancient land opened again to the West. The Crossetts returned and hastened to the village where they had left the tiny struggling group of believers. There was no “small church” in the village anymore! Instead, from that Bible study had grown a church of four thousand people. This body of believers had spawned other churches. In the surrounding region had sprung up nearly a dozen churches, each with a membership of no less than a thousand people. All the Crossetts did was pray. It was all they could do. But through their faith and duty God triumphed. He turned back the flood of evil. He shut the lions' mouths again. The God of Daniel is alive and well. The victories of God are as close as faith and duty.

[This story is found in Bryan Chappell, Standing Your Ground: A Call to Courage in an Age of Compromise. Messages on Daniel. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989, pp. 165-6].

Today, God does not ask us to solve the messes of our world. He does not ask us to solve our problems. What he does ask is that we be faithful to him no matter what. No matter what kind of mess you are experiencing right now, God wants you to stand your ground for what's right. Believe in him, trust him, and obey him. God says, “Do what I command and I'll take care of the rest.” This is what the Lord wants from us today. Our commands are clear: “Faith and Duty, faith and duty, faith and duty.” God promises he'll take care of the rest in his own time and way. He promises us, “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

-cwarpula@westuchuch.com