

DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN

Daniel 6

Daniel was one of the most remarkable and wonderful characters in the Bible. We get our first glimpse of him when he was in his teens. Daniel was blessed with good companions. Having been well disciplined, early in life Daniel learned how to say "no" to temptation, and to say it emphatically. As a young man far from home, and a captive living among strangers in a foreign city, he was offered a portion of the king's meat and wine, but he refused to partake of them. He maintained his noble purpose of not defiling himself.

There is an old adage, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," and the majority of people live accordingly. Many people hesitate to do wrong at home, but without any compunction of conscience do not hesitate to do wrong a thousand miles from home. Not so with Daniel. It did not make any difference if Daniel were far removed from home, he did what he knew God wanted him to do just the same as if he had been walking the streets of Jerusalem. He refused to permit his testimony for God to be marred by anything questionable or sinful. "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself."

Darius, the king, changed the system of government in his empire. He divided the empire into one hundred and twenty provinces under as many princes. Over these princes he set in authority three presidents, and over the entire group Daniel was in charge. Because Daniel was guilty of the serious crime of success, he encountered the seething jealousies of the presidents and princes. They called in the last reserve of their diabolical ingenuity for plans to get rid of Daniel. Their chicanery devised a trap for him which centered in his religion. They said, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." What a compliment to Daniel! What a testimony to his integrity! What honor, though they sought shame! What praise, though they were seeking censure!

Those dishonorable and jealous princes sought to touch Daniel in the most vital place, namely, in his relation to God. Seeing they could not trip him concerning his love for God, they decided that they would trap him.

A deputation of Daniel's enemies went to the king and flattered him by asking him to sign a decree binding all men for thirty days to abstain from worshipping any god, or asking a petition of any god or man, except the king himself. In substance they said to the king, we would not dispense with prayer, but when folks pray for the next month let them pray only to you. By appealing to his vanity they persuaded the king to issue a decree that no one within the limits of his dominion be permitted for thirty days to offer any petition to any god, but to the king only. This incident simply illustrates the fact that when a man comes to any position of prominence there will always be some people who want his place. When the flattered king yielded and signed the decree by which these jealous courtiers hoped to bring about the ruin of their superior, whom they hated, they were filled with glee.

Daniel was unaffected by the decree. Knowing that when human laws are found to clash with divine commands it is right to "obey God rather than man," Daniel maintained his regular prayer habits. He refused to be swayed by popular opinion. He refused to be coerced to do wrong, even by a king's decree. Even though he knew that a decree had been signed

which made it unlawful to pray, Daniel carried on exactly as he had before. While waiting thirty days without prayer does not bother some people, it was too long for Daniel to remain off his knees. The only time that some people call upon God is in the hour of distress, when things are getting darker by the minutes.

Not for a moment was there the slightest indication that Daniel worried about the decree of the king which stipulated that if any person violated it by prayer that he would be cast in the den of lions. Not for a moment did he hesitate to go ahead doing what he knew to be right. Continuing to live by principle instead of policy, Daniel went into his room, committed himself into the keeping power of God, and prayer in the freshness of the dawn, in the splendor of the noontide and in the shadows of the evening. He was determined to give God the first place in his life, as he had endeavored to do from the days of his youth. He would not allow anything, not even the expressed will of the king, to keep him from discharging his duty to God. Three times daily he nourished his soul by waiting upon God in prayer. Thanksgiving to God continued to well up in Daniel's heart.

That there is always something for which we can be grateful is an absolute certainty. A testimonial service in one church brings this fact to memory. One Sunday morning that pastor said to his congregation, "On Wednesday even we will talk about the troubles we never had." So, at the meeting one woman said, "I thank God I have never had appendicitis." Another arose and said, "I thank God I have never had to have an operation." A third said, "I thank God I've never had a drunken husband." Then a fourth got up and said, "I thank God I have never had a husband of any sort."

Daniel's attitude was this: "I prize the privilege of prayer so highly that rather than miss it, I will lay down my life. I would rather die praying than to live without praying." Daniel showed utter obliviousness to consequences. He lived dangerously, but victoriously. He was not careful about his conduct, so quietly went about his regular habits of devotion. Knowing his habits, his enemies burst into Daniel's house at the time he was accustomed to praying, and found him kneeling in prayer with his face toward Jerusalem. Determined to be loyal and true to God, Daniel had walked into the trap of those jealous rascals and flung himself upon God Who was able to carry him through safely. This man of courage had faced his enemies without fear. Someone has said, "Putting up with things that cannot be helped means courage; putting up with things that can be helped means cowardice." Well, it is a certainty that Daniel was not a coward, but a brave man.

Someone has said, "To be unwilling to bleed is to be incapacitated to bless." Dr. John Gill, predecessor to Spurgeon in London, was told by a member of his church that if he published his book, "The Cause of God and Truth," he would lose some of his best friends and that his income would decrease." Dr. Gill replied, "I can afford to be poor, but I cannot afford to injure my conscience." In the days when preachers were put in jail for their convictions things happened. Things happened in Virginia when preachers were jailed for preaching the gospel. Patrick Henry defended one. He held up the bill of indictment and said something to this effect: "My client has been put in jail -- and for what? Preaching the gospel; preaching the gospel! He was put in jail for preaching the glorious gospel of the Son of God." And his client went free.

There was but one thought in the minds of these men who had kept their malicious eyes on Daniel, and that was to put him out of the way. So, with

triumphant tread they went to the king and informed him of the violation of his decree. When the king heard it he "was sore displeased with himself." So, he went to work to try to undo what he had done, but the law was unalterable. Finally, the king was obliged to see that the decree was carried out. As the sun was disappearing behind the curtains of the night, Daniel was cast into the lions' den and "a stone was brought and laid upon the mouth of the den." To his malicious enemies that closed den meant the end of Daniel's career. But the king went to his palace dreadfully and depressingly disturbed. He could not sleep. Due to the activity of his conscience, all through the night the king imagined that he heard the crunching of bones in the jaws of the lions. That night his palace was a torture chamber to him. He was never able to close his eyes in sleep that whole night.

Early next morning he went in haste to the lions' den. With a voice of deep solicitude he called for Daniel, the servant of the living God. To his surprise Daniel was alive and unharmed. The king recognized his voice and said, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually able to deliver thee from the lions?" Daniel assured him that God had sent His angel and had shut the mouths of the lions so that they had not injured him, and that all of this had been done because of his innocency. With great joy the king commanded that Daniel be taken out of the lions' den. He also commanded that the men who had brought the accusation against Daniel be cast into the den, together with their wives and children. The Bible does not commend the act of that heathen king, but it does record the fact of what took place.

Thus the cruel deed of Daniel's enemies descended upon their own heads, and their lives were snuffed out. In the place where they wanted Daniel to die, they died. The lions that they wanted to eat Daniel ate them. What they wanted Darius to do to Daniel he did to them instead. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."

When Daniel was delivered from that lions' den, and Darius saw that "no manner of hurt was found upon him because he believed in his God," the king was convinced beyond a peradventure of a doubt that Daniel's God was the true God Who ruled over all. "Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian" (Daniel 6:25-28).

As we see Daniel being cast into the den of lions, we exclaim, "What an ordeal!" But as we hear Darius proclaiming that edict, we cannot but exclaim, "What a sequel!" We never know what great thing may come of it if we stand firm in our faith despite temptations and persecutions and adversities. The eyes of men are upon us, and, if we are true to our faith, God will certainly bless our witness for Him. Let us trust God as Daniel did.

Here we see the value of one individual. After all, the greatest works have been done by individuals. You are just one. I am just one. But each one counts. Each counts as does one link in a chain. You count, just as one letter in the alphabet counts. If one man only, like Daniel, meant so much in the cause of righteousness in his day, how much more can we together mean in these tremendous days of opportunity in which we are living!