

# Into the Lion's Den

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Date: 05 June 2016

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, good morning, everyone. It is great to be with you. Why don't you turn in your Bibles to that wonderful and thrilling passage in Daniel chapter 6, if you have it there. It's going to be so crucial this morning that we have God's Word open in front of us to hear what he's saying to us. So can I encourage you to make every effort to get the Scriptures open in front of you. And let's get into this, Daniel chapter 6. I found it so incredible this week. And let's finish this chapter starting from verse 19 and reading to the end of chapter 6.

From verse 19. 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?

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 sights, nor have I ever done any wrong before you, your majesty. 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. Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language and all the earth, may you prosper greatly. I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom, people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel, for he is the living

God and he endures forever. His kingdom will not be destroyed. His dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves. He performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions. So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

What a thrilling chapter of scripture. Let me pray and let's get into it together. Our gracious father, as we come to your word now, we ask that by your spirit, that you would give us what we have not. You would help us to see what we see not.

[ 2 : 4 3 ] And you would help make us what we are not. And we ask these things in the precious name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen. So I wonder if you have ever fancied yourself as a superhero.

No hands. We're counting on that. Great. No one's fancied themselves as a superhero. Well, I found this website this week called the World Superhero Register. And this is a website where you can go on and you can apply to be recognized as an official superhero. So I'm on this, I'm intrigued.

I'm on this website this week and I come across Captain Ozone. This is a real man. Okay. Captain Ozone. He tours around the US and he goes into schools and businesses and he educates people on how they can take care of the environment. This is Captain Ozone. Okay. His special power is that he organizes rallies and petitions tirelessly for the cause of renewable energy. There's Captain Ozone.

Okay. Now picture this scene. You're Daniel and you're in that lion's den. And just before the stone is rolled in front of it, Darius shouts into the lion's den. He says, Daniel, it's okay.

Captain Ozone's on the way to save the day. How would you feel? Right? The world is full of lousy saviors. Now the question of Daniel chapter six is, who is able to save? Who is able to save? Who is the one who is in total control of all things? Who is the one in whom you need to be placing your trust and your hope? Who is able to save? Now Daniel chapter six, it's the last of the narrative stories in the book of Daniel. And we're coming to the close of this little subsection, if you like, from that started in chapter two and finishes in chapter seven. And it's a little subsection that is written in Aramaic. The everyday language of the everyday people of the everyday world.

[ 4 : 50 ] That's Aramaic. Why is it written in Aramaic? So that the message can get out to as many people as possible. If you remember chapters four and five, we met two kings. We met Nebuchadnezzar and we met Belshazzar. And the question of chapters four and five is, who is the true king? Is it the king Nebuchadnezzar? Is it king Belshazzar? No, actually God is the king who is above all kings.

That was the message of chapters four and five. And if that's the message of chapters four and five, who is king? The chapters of chapters three and six, the message is, the question is, who is able to save?

Now if you're on the ball, you'll notice the huge parallels between the story of Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego in chapter three, and this chapter here in chapter six. Now is that coincidence?

Absolutely not. It's the same message. Exactly the same. Don't waste your time putting your trust and your confidence in anything else or anyone else to save you. Only God can save. Faith wins the day.

Favor with man cannot save you. The law cannot save you. The king cannot save you. You cannot save you. And Captain Ozone, he definitely cannot save you. So who is able to save? Now this is where I want us to get this morning. This is what this means to us. That as God's people, we are to stand up and stand out.

[ 6 : 32 ] Why? Because our God, he stands over all. Okay? We've to stand up and stand out as God's people, because our God, he stands over all. Now let's get our teeth into this thrilling bit of narrative.

Verses one to nine, we see Daniel. And Daniel is trustworthy yet targeted. And if you glance your eye at chapter five and verse 30, you'll notice that there's a new sheriff in town.

And not just a new sheriff, there's a new superpower who's in town. So the Babylonian kingdom has gone, and it's been replaced by that of the Medes and the Persians. But despite all those changes, see at verse one, that King Darius has kept Daniel right at the top.

That's not changed for Daniel. He's still right there. Now Daniel at this point, and this is really cool. Daniel at this point, remember, is no longer the young man that we met in chapter one. Daniel at this point is most likely in his 80s. And he's still going for it in his faith.

Still going for it at 80. No saga cruise for Daniel. No holiday home in the south of France kicking up his feet for Daniel. No bingo on a Tuesday night for Daniel. What is he doing?

[ 7 : 53 ] He's living for the glory of God and making a difference for him in this city where he finds himself. I love Daniel. And as I was preparing for it this week, this always happens when you prepare sermons.

People come into your head. People come into your head. And I guess I'm massively encouraged by the generation who, shall we say, are closer to Daniel's age than mine. Right? Massively encouraged by you guys.

Because like Daniel, you are going for it in your faith. You're still coming to stuff. You're still encouraging. And to hear how you serve one another. How you care for one another. How you pick people up and drop them off because you love them. Can I just say at this point, just keep going in your faith. I find myself massively encouraged when I look to people like that. Still going strong in their faith. This is Daniel. There he is in his 80s going for it in the Lord. He's a seasoned saint.

Now we get a bit of information as to the political system of the Medes and the Persians. What have they got? 120 satraps. So that's local governors. They're set up to rule throughout the kingdom.

And Daniel is one of the three governors who is over and above them. Okay? So he's right at the top of the tree. In fact, so distinguished is Daniel. Did you notice it in verse 3 that King Darius is about to promote him to be the head of the whole kingdom? So effectively, he's going to be prime minister. That's what Darius has in his head for Daniel. So you can imagine as people watch Daniel climb the proverbial game of political snakes and ladders. What are they hoping for? Well, they're hoping that he's going to hit the snake that's going to drag him right down to the bottom. They hate Daniel. They hate him because he stands for something that they cannot stand. And verse 4, they plot to take him down. Now who is in on the scheme to take Daniel down? Do you notice verse 4? It's the satraps and the administrators. So the whole regime is out to get Daniel. This is like the CIA and the MI6 teaming up here to try and get Daniel down. I mean, your boy is a wanted man. How are they going to get him down? Well, they're going to find dirt on him.

[10:10] Dirt in connection with what? His conduct. And here is the wonder of this chapter. All these men in the place of influence. All these men with their fingers on a lot of pies.

All these men privy to so much information in the kingdom. How successful are they in finding anything on Daniel? Verse 4, they found nothing. Nothing. No skeletons in the closet. No dodgy offshore savings accounts. No secret mistress on the side. No questionable expenses claims. No second home and the cost of the taxpayer. No diddle tax returns. No stolen office stationery. They find nothing. What do they find at verse 4? They find out that he is a man of unflinching integrity who's been neither negligent in his duties nor corrupt in his dealings. Do you see what the author is trying to let us know here? That Daniel's private life is the same as his public life. That Daniel's insides are the same as his outsides. Now what a witness to the God that Daniel claims to know and worship.

Author Chuck Swindle, he writes this. Few things are more infectious than a godly lifestyle. The people you rub shoulders with every day need that kind of challenge.

Not prudish. Not preachy. Just, and hear this in American accent here, just crackerjack clean living. Crackerjack clean living. Let me ask you this morning, are you a crackerjack clean liver?

Is that what people would find out about us this morning if they were to go fishing for him? Is that what people would say about you in the office? That he isn't like everyone else?

[12:06] That she doesn't do the things that everyone else does? There's something different about them. Now just in my jobs I've had over the last, my lifetime. A few of them. I've come to notice that people notice this stuff a lot more than we think they do. I remember finding myself sitting there thinking, is this making any difference in this place? Well can I encourage you, if that's you this morning, to know that people notice.

And to encourage you to keep going, living for the glory of God in your workplace. Do the job that you've been asked to do with integrity. Handle your tongue with integrity. Hold to the truth of God's words with integrity. And let's stand up and let's stand out. Why? Because our God, he is standing over all. Now I don't know if you noticed it this week, but our dear brother Jeremy Balfour was in the news.

And the sun, the paper that's read most out of all the papers in our land, ran with the headline, Tory MSP Jeremy Balfour Blast Gay Marriage. That was the headline in the paper there. He's only been in the office, what, two weeks, three weeks, something like that. Now why did they run with that? Well, because Jeremy took his stand on God's words. And when he was asked about his boss's planned same-sex marriage, he said, my understanding is that marriage is between one man and one woman.

That's what the Bible teaches. That's what he said. That's what he said as the eyes of our country looked at him. Now is that not scary but courageous integrity? There is a man in our city who is standing on the truth of God's words. Daniel stood on God's words and people hated him for it.

These men out to get Daniel, they're going to get nothing on him on his conduct. So how are they going to get him? Well, they're going to find a clash point between God's law and the law of the land.

[ 14 : 11 ] Where is the clash? Well, where is the clash? They know Daniel prays. They know he prays. Would that not be an amazing thing to say of you that the only thing people could get you on is that you pray?

And the question to us, isn't it, is if prayer was a crime, how much evidence would there be to convict us? But here's Daniel. They get him on prayer because they know Daniel will not compromise in his convictions. They know Daniel is loyal to the core and because of that they know he's not going to change and he is a guy who prays. So what do they do? They go to the king and they massage King Darius's ego at verse 7. Do you notice that? They convince him to pass a law that no one is to pray to anyone except him for the next 30 days. And if anyone dare defy that, then in the den, in the den, you can hear them say it, can't you? Now you're the king and somebody comes up to you and says that. You think, oh, what a power trip. People praying to me across this whole kingdom for the next 30 days. Oh, I can't get enough of this, can't you, King Darius? Where do I sign?

That's what I want. Where do I sign? But hook, line and sinker, Darius unknowingly walks straight into setting the trap that's going to catch Daniel right in his teeth. Who is going to save Daniel?

Favor with his peers, favor with man is not going to save Daniel. The law cannot save Daniel. Who is able to save Daniel? Well, let's move on here. Verses 10 to 18. We see Daniel is committed yet captured because I guess Daniel's got a choice at this point. As he hears the news of the decree, what's he going to do? Verse 10, where does this instinct take him? Does he march straight up to the king and demand a hearing? Does he appeal to the house of lords to get this thing overturned?

Does he hire a lawyer to stand for him? Where does Daniel's instinct take him? It takes him to the place where he always goes, to his God in prayer. Now, do we not know that to be true that sometimes in life, how do we, how are convictions in life revealed? Well, they're revealed through crises.

[ 16 : 40 ] Are they not? That's how we know what's really going on. When a crisis comes, where do you go? Where does Daniel go to his prayer mat? This crisis reveals to us that Daniel is a man of prayer.

And I guess I was sitting there thinking to myself this week, Danny boy, come on. It's only 30 days, right? It's not as if they've passed the law saying you can never pray to this God, your God. It's only 30 days. Could you not just keep quiet for 30 days? Not Daniel. Because prayer is so pivotal and crucial to his life. He's not going to budge because he knows who is really in control and he knows who is really able to save him. And I think the thing for us to see here, this story is so well known, but the truth of us to see here is that this is where Daniel wins the battle, right here. The lion's den, to be honest, it was almost quite easy, but he could have totally capitulated at this point.

This is where he wins the battle. Because the wonder of this chapter is not that Daniel gets out of the lion's den, although that is cool. It's that he was willing to go into the lion's den in the first place.

He will not compromise on his convictions. He gets down on his knees and he prays. Now notice three quick things about Daniel's prayer life here that I was so challenged on this week. Three quick things. Firstly, notice the posture of his prayer life. What does he do? Well, this 80-year-old man gets down on his knees. That's going to hurt, I'd imagine, but he gets down on his knees. Now, why does he get down on his knees? Because he is reminding himself of who he comes before.

That I am the servant and he is the king. That I am the creature and he is the creator. This is the heart stance of a heart that is humbling itself before God. There's his posture. Second thing to notice, notice the content of his prayer. His window is open and it's facing Jerusalem. Now, that is not superstition. That is scriptural. What is Daniel doing? Well, he's recalling a verse in 1 Kings chapter 8. You can look it up afterwards. But it's Solomon's prayer of dedication. And there, Solomon is anticipating a day when God's people will be in exile away from their homeland. And what does he urge them to do when they're there? To seek their God in prayer and pray for Jerusalem? That's what he urges them to pray. So what is Daniel praying for? He's praying for the good of God's people. And he's praying that God would be glorified in this disaster zone that's the Babylon. That's what he's praying.

[ 19 : 23 ] And also, do you notice that he is praying with thanksgiving to his gods? And he asks for help. And I think in the spirit of, not my will, but your will be done. This is what Daniel's praying here.

That's the content of his prayer. And thirdly, notice the frequency of his prayer. He prays three times a day. And notice that little phrase at the end of verse 10, if you've got it there.

Just as he had done before. Is prayer a new thing for Daniel? Is this try praying? No. Here is an old man who has made prayer central to his life. He has made it a holy habit in his life. I mean, here is a prayer warrior, if ever I've seen one. And I found him such a marvelous and inspiring example this week.

Because how can Daniel face the prospect of death with such boldness? How can he be so confident in the face of persecution? I think that's such a relevant question for us, isn't it? Where does he get his confidence from? Well, he gets his confidence from the fact that he knows who his God is.

To see that, that his relationship with God is not mundane and occasional. It's living and it's frequent. And I guess the challenge for us this morning is, do some of us need to rekindle our relationship with the Lord? Are we going through difficult circumstances? And we need to turn to God in prayer and rekindle that relationship that we have with him. And I guess the second thing to see and probably where I felt it hardest this week is, do some of us need to recommit to that holy habit of seeking our God in prayer every day? Seeking him in prayer. Now, Robert Murray McShane was one of my favorite Scottish pastors of yesteryear to read. He said this to his congregation. He said, Oh, believer, consider Christ. Look and look and look again until the breathing of your soul is Abba

[ 21 : 43 ] Father. Wonderful. Look and look and look again to Christ until the breathing of your soul is Abba Father. Do you see what he's trying to say? That relationship with the Lord, that's how Daniel can go through these hard and difficult circumstances. So as God's people, let's stand up and let's stand out because our God, he reigns over all. Here is Daniel on his knees before God in prayer and Daniel's caught in the act. And the men that were out to get him, they make haste to the king and verse 13, they tell the king about this rebel Daniel. Notice how they describe him at verse 13. One of the exiles from Judah, that's how they describe him. As if to say, King Darius, he's not one of us. He never was one of us. You can't trust him. He's not loyal. And the king realizes what he's done. How does the king feel about this? Verse 14, he's greatly distressed. And what is he? Well, he's eager to rescue Daniel. And so what does he do? Well, he makes every effort to do so. But the king is unwilling to retract the law and reverse Daniel's plight, despite all the goodwill in the world towards this man who he really admires.

Now notice the great irony of this section. The king, who has the world at his fingertips, cannot sleep. He's restless. And yet Daniel, with the den in his eyes, is at peace. It's the great irony of this section. So Daniel, he's thrown into the lion's den and a stone is rolled to the front of the den to seal the deal. And as the readers were meant to go, it's a cliffhanger. What happens next?

I bet you can never guess. But get yourself in Daniel's mind at this point in the story. Do you not think it appeared to Daniel as he's been thrown in there? Do you not think that was just a bit of his mind that thought, God, you haven't answered my prayer? God, I prayed for help. I prayed for deliverance. And did you answer? You didn't answer. And here I am. I'm stuck with these lions. Could God not have saved him from this whole ordeal? Absolutely God could have saved him from this whole ordeal.

But you see, God's plan for Daniel was not to rescue him from the trial. It was to rescue him and teach him through the trial. For God, this is what we see here, is far more committed to his people's holiness and character than he is to their happiness and comfort.

God is committed to making his people more like Jesus and teaching his people lessons about him and about us as we journey through those trials. Because do you think Daniel was the same after this incident? Do you think he came out of the den and somebody asked him, how is your God doing? He's all right. He's okay. Do you think he came out and he was, our God, my God is stronger. My God is greater. My God is greater than any other, like we were singing. Do you think that was Daniel's shout?

[ 24 : 53 ] Do you not think he came out a completely different man and he viewed life completely differently? He would never have got that had he not gone to the den. Here is Daniel. The ordeal he went through jotted down here, presented to the world so that millions of people around the world could read this, including us this morning, and see what kind of God Daniel's God really is.

Favor with man cannot save Daniel. The law cannot save Daniel. The king cannot save Daniel. Daniel cannot save Daniel. So who is able to rescue and save Daniel?

Well, verses 19 to 28, we see Daniel honored yet homeless. So at first opportunity in the morning, the king rushes to see if Daniel is still there. Has God been able to rescue Daniel? Well, feel the wonder of the first few verses at verse 21. The first few words rather of verse 21. Daniel answered.

Daniel answered. In fact, this is the only time in this chapter that Daniel speaks. Did you notice that? And he tells the king how his God sent an angel to close up the mouths of the lions. And why did God do that? Verse 21, because Daniel was found innocent in his sight. And so what did they do? They haul Daniel out of the den. And as they examine his body, they see that he's not going to scratch on him.

And see the centerpiece declaration of this chapter at the end of verse 23. Why was Daniel unharmed? Because he trusted in his God.

[ 26 : 45 ] And just in case we were tempted to think that maybe the lions weren't hungry, in go the men who had conspired against Daniel and the lions absolutely devoured them.

And the king of the Medes and the Persians, like the king of Babylon before him, he issues this declaration of the greatness of Daniel's gods. Who has saved Daniel? Favor with man hasn't saved Daniel.

The law hasn't saved Daniel. The king hasn't saved Daniel. Daniel hasn't saved Daniel. Just like Captain Ozone, they are all lousy saviors. God has shown that he is the only one who is able to save.

So as his people, let's stand up and let's stand out. Why? Because our God, he stands over all.

Now as we said at the outset, this is the end of the narrative stories in this book of Daniel. And I was thinking on it this week. If it were me, how would I have finished this bit of narrative?

[ 27 : 52 ] How would I have finished the last bit of narrative in the book of Daniel? Well, I think, as I always think a lot of times, I'd probably look to my inner Peter Jackson. I would have finished this like the Lord of the Rings.

That's how I would have finished this. Right? Daniel equals Bilbo Baggins. That's how I would have finished it. So there it is, the old Bilbo Baggins. He's now safe at home in the shire.

And he's sitting around the campfire telling stories with his pipe and his slippers to anyone who would listen. Stories about who he encountered in Middle Earth. And the places he went.

The things that he saw. All in his time away from home. That's how I would have finished this. There's Daniel. He's telling his stories to the people who would listen. That's exactly how I would have finished this.

And all with the whole of his music playing sweetly in the background. That's how I would have finished it. Right? But that's not how the book ends. That's not how this section of the book ends.

[ 28 : 49 ] Notice verse 28. We can so quickly skim over that verse. Now under King Cyrus, who is mentioned here, God's people eventually, they are allowed back to Jerusalem.

But as far as we know, Daniel was not one of them. And he spent his whole life in exile and he never got home. Now what does that tell us?

Well it tells us that there's something bigger at stake here than simply getting back to the land of the temple. Getting to the physical Jerusalem, that would be great.

But getting to the heavenly Jerusalem, that would be far greater. Think that's the purpose of where this ends. Because that is the purpose and the business of which God is in now.

And how would God do that saving work? Well, I don't know if you noticed it as we went through. I tried to drop the breadcrumbs as we went through. But I'm no Hans Christian Andersen.

[ 29 : 51 ] I'm not very good at writing fables. I tried to drop the breadcrumbs here. Do you notice the massive parallels between the life of Daniel in this chapter and the life of Jesus Christ? Like Daniel, Jesus was the one who was truly blameless.

Like Daniel, Jesus was one who was targeted by the mob. Like Daniel, Jesus was one who prayed fervently in his time of crisis. Like Daniel, at Jesus' trial there was an earthly king who had all the power and all the sympathy to do something about it.

And yet was unwilling to save. Like Daniel, Jesus was unjustly sentenced to his death. But unlike Daniel, Jesus wasn't delivered from death.

He tasted death. How was God going to save his people? By sending his son who would willingly go to the lion's den. And bear the punishment of death for his people's sins.

So that his people would not have to. Why was Daniel delivered? Because he was declared innocent in God's sight. That's what the text says. Because he was innocent in God's sight.

[ 31 : 04 ] How are we delivered? Well, because Jesus takes our death and he gives us his life. And standing with Jesus Christ, standing in Jesus Christ, we are declared innocent before God the Father.

And like Daniel, the tomb was not found to have triumphed. And like Daniel, Jesus answered. And just as Jesus emerged victorious from the tomb, so every person that trusts in him.

For the story of Daniel here, if you think about it logically, the message cannot be that Christians will never face death in this life. That cannot be the message of this chapter.

The long list of Christian martyrs, both of yesterday and today, tells us that that cannot be. So what does it mean? Well, it means that for all those who trust Jesus Christ as their savior, they too ultimately will be delivered from death because they're innocent in his sight, whilst God's enemies will be defeated and crushed.

What is the message of Daniel chapter 6? It's that only this God is able to save. It's that only this God is in total control of all things.

[ 32 : 27 ] And it's that this God is the one who you need to turn to and trust as the one who is able to save you. And I guess the question for us readers is, who or what are we trusting in to save us?

That's the question. Maybe you're here this morning and you're not a believer in this God. Well, let me ask you, who or what are you trusting in this morning to save you?

How will you be declared innocent in God's sight when he comes to judge? To trust in anything and anyone other than this God, this God who will have the final word in all of history, is akin to trusting in Captain Ozone to save you.

And for God's people, what confidence this chapter gives us in the power of our God who stands with us and who is mighty to save.

So as his people, let's stand up and let's stand out. Why? Because our God stands over all. Dare to be a Daniel.

[ 33 : 38 ] Dare to stand alone. Dare to have a purpose firm. And dare to make it known. What a thrilling chapter this is. Let me pray. So Lord, we thank you for this story of Daniel.

And we thank you for the encouragement. And we thank you for the incredible hope there is in the truth that we see here that you are mighty to save.

So help us this week as we live in this world, as your people in this hostile world, to live distinctly for your son, Jesus Christ. To love him, to cherish him, to seek him, to live for him in this world.

Oh, our Father, would you give us the power to do that. And we make these prayers in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.