**The Lion Tamer**

Daniel 6

Ok, so ***Daniel and the lion’s den*** is probably not your usual Christmas Sunday message. But you’ll see that it actually fits very nicely even though there aren’t any shepherds or stables or special shiny stars. There actually are wise men from the east and angels. Although the wise men are called satraps and they’re the bad guys in this one. And it seems there is just the one angel, but that’s all that was needed apparently.

Remember the context.



***Daniel was taken as a captive to Babylon in 605 BC***, when Nebuchadnezzar rose to power. At that point Daniel was a young man, probably just 15 or so. Now Daniel is around 80 years old, having spent most of his life in Babylon, though now the Medes are in power, ruled by Darius. Which is precisely what Daniel foresaw in chapter 2, interpreting Nebuchadnezzar’s dream about the statue. ***The golden age of Babylon was over*** and now it was the silver age of the Medes, to be quickly followed by the bronze period of the Persians.

So this was the time of the Jewish exile from the promised land, a time during which God was protecting and preserving a remnant of his people. **God promised through Jeremiah** that 70 years would go by for the Jews in Babylon, but then they would be able to go back to Israel. The first of those exiles started to return to Israel in 539 BC, soon after this experience of Daniel. ***Isaiah even foretold the name of the king*** who would let the Jews return, calling Cyrus the servant of the Lord!

So ***Daniel represented FAITHFUL ISRAEL*** in the time of the exile. His three young friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego showed he wasn’t the only faithful one. But it seems he was the one who lived the longest. So even Daniel’s survival in Babylon was a sign of God’s favor and protection of his people. The lion’s den shows that ***no danger was too great*** for God, no threat to His people was beyond His reach. God taught those lessons to the powerful king Nebuchadnezzar, what are a handful of lions?

So let’s be encouraged today by **how God always protects and provides for his people**. Whatever you are facing right now, whatever danger or threat, whatever worry or concern, the Lord your God is with you. Look at how King Darius sums up the lesson:

“People are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever… He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who saved Daniel from the power of the lions.” Daniel 6:26-27

God kept showing these foreign kings that there is only one true and living God. His kingdom rules over all other kingdoms. And the way God proved His character and power over and over again was by saving His people. We will see **three ways Daniel points ahead to Jesus**. First:

**How Daniel Foreshadowed Jesus:**

1. The **Righteous** Servant

“Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him.” Daniel 6:3

***Daniel was one of just three top officials***, governing the whole kingdom of Darius the Mede. He had 120 satraps, but they reported to three sort of prime ministers, who reported back to the king. So, Daniel was a big deal. And the reason he was elevated was due to this “excellent spirit” in him. He excelled at everything. ***But this made the other 119 officials jealous***, so they sought some grounds to take him down. Politics as usual.

1. The **Righteous** Servant
	* Like Daniel, Jesus was both **Innocent** and excellent

“But they could find no ground for complaint or fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him.” Daniel 6:4

The trouble with Daniel is that ***he was a really good guy***. And we know that’s super rare in politicians – both ancient and modern. Obviously, the other satraps and officials were not the most noble or honest, since they are trying to take out the most righteous among them.

So, you see how Daniel foreshadows Jesus: he was both innocent and excellent. “There was an excellent spirit in him.” Not only was Daniel blameless, **he was truly righteous**. No one could accuse him of any wrongdoing. No skeletons in his closet.

Of course, we know that Jesus was put on trial and one after another, witnesses came forward trying to accuse him of different things. But no two witnesses could agree, and no charges could stick because there was nothing that he did wrong. ***Just as Daniel represented a true Israelite, Jesus was the ultimate righteous Jew.***

And this IS what Christmas is all about – **God providing a truly sufficient Savior**. The first qualification for the Savior is that He had to be human in order to take the place of humans. And he had to be righteous. He had to be like an unblemished lamb, a perfect sacrifice. That’s what the incarnation made possible – for God to become a man, born of a virgin. And Jesus “grew in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man.” He was tempted in the wilderness, like Israel, but unlike Israel, Jesus resisted all the temptations of the devil. He was totally sinless and totally righteous. He fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law completely. Like Daniel, Jesus was the righteous servant. Second.

**How Daniel Foreshadowed Jesus:**

1. The Faithful **Son**

“He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed, and gave thanks before his God… making petition and plea before his God.” Daniel 6:10-11

Even though the jealous satraps convinced King Darius to **make a decree** that no one could pray to anyone but him, Daniel continued his practice of kneeling in prayer three times every day. He was a faithful son of Israel and child of God. This was what God desired of all of His people, as Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 6 – “***Love the Lord your God*** with all your heart…” Jesus quoted that as the first and greatest commandment, which every good Jew already knew because it was the Great Shma, the heart of the Torah.

King Darius probably wasn’t aware of these Jewish laws, but he respected Daniel’s faith, devotion and leadership ability. So even though he had to follow the law he had written and throw Daniel into the lion’s den, the king said:

1. The Faithful **Son**
	* Like Daniel, Jesus was **Devoted** to God in prayer and submission

“May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!” Daniel 6:16

Darius knew that Daniel was a faithful Jew, devoted to his God. Jesus was not only the righteous servant of the Lord, he was also the true and faithful Son of God. ***Twice God the Father spoke from heaven*** over Jesus saying, “This is my beloved son, with him I am well pleased.”

In John 5 Jesus said that he did nothing on his own but only what he saw the Father doing. ***Jesus lived in total submission*** to the Father’s will and to the Jewish law. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus prayed and asked the Father if the cup might pass from him, if there was some other way they could go, still Jesus surrendered saying, ***“Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done.”***

Just as Daniel was righteous and devoted, faithful to the Lord, so Jesus was both righteous and faithful as a servant and a son. And ***just as Daniel got in trouble with those in power***, so did Jesus. In the end, the only thing the Jews could accuse Jesus of was claiming to be God, which he did. Even Pilate, the Roman governor, couldn’t find anything against Jesus, and just like Darius with Daniel, Pilate tried to get Jesus released. But in the end, Pilate washed his hands of the situation and handed Jesus over to be executed.

And here we find the most striking similarity between Daniel and Jesus: ***both faced certain death, with a stone sealed over them***, but both had the stone moved away and emerged from the darkness of death back into the light of life.

King Darius wasn’t able to sleep the night Daniel was in the lion’s den. At first light the king raced to the place and called out to see if Daniel, by some miracle, had been able to survive. Daniel responded:

**How Daniel Foreshadowed Jesus:**

1. The **Risen** Savior

“O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me.” Daniel 6:22

Now, we don’t know if the flannelgraphs and kids Bibles are accurate, showing Daniel cuddled up with five or six affectionate and purring lions for a nice, warm and cozy night’s sleep. What we do know is that those lions did not harm Daniel and the reason they didn’t harm him is because God intervened.

**How Daniel Foreshadowed Jesus:**

1. The **Risen** Savior

“They have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him.” Daniel 6:22

Daniel’s salvation was a sign of his righteousness. We know from the NT that “the wages of sin is death.” In this case, Daniel was not deserving of death, so God delivered him.

1. The **Risen** Savior
	* Like Daniel, Jesus was **Vindicated** by escaping death

“So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.” Daniel 6:23

Not a scratch. ***Just as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego*** climbed out of the fiery furnace and their robes were not singed and there was not even a smell of smoke on them, so Daniel emerged from the lion’s den without so much as a mark from one of the lions’ claws.

So with Jesus, though he was beaten bloody and executed in the most public and gruesome way, **he emerged from the tomb on the third day** victorious over sin and death forever.

Daniel was saved because he was righteous and because he trusted in God. Jesus was raised from the dead because he surrendered to the Father’s plan and gave up his life as a ransom for many. And when God raised him from the dead it was **the ultimate proof that Jesus’ sacrifice was accepted** and was sufficient to pay for your sin and mine. It proved that Jesus was blameless and not deserving of death, he was the righteous servant. It proved that Jesus was the faithful Son of God, always devoted to the Father. And it proved that Jesus is Lord - the true King of Israel, the Lord of all things who conquered all of our enemies especially sin and death.

And so we come back to where we started, with the **kingdom-wide memo** sent out by King Darius, proclaiming peace to everyone:

“People are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever… He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who saved Daniel from the power of the lions.” Daniel 6:26-27

Through this miraculous deliverance of Daniel from death God proved His existence, His power and His love.

Through Jesus’ resurrection God proved, once and for all, His existence, power and love and grace and glory and goodness and generosity and more. So here is our summary:

**How Daniel Foreshadowed Jesus:**

1. The **Righteous** Servant
	* Like Daniel, Jesus was both **Innocent** and excellent
2. The Faithful **Son**
	* Like Daniel, Jesus was **Devoted** to God in prayer and submission
3. The **Risen** Savior
	* Like Daniel, Jesus was **Vindicated** by escaping death

Like everything in the OT, Daniel pointed ahead to the Lord Jesus. Daniel was a righteous servant. Even as a high ranking government official, there was nothing anyone could accuse him of. He was known for his goodness and effectiveness as a leader.

And so Daniel foreshadowed Jesus, ***the ultimate righteous servant of God***. Jesus was not just blameless and innocent, he was perfectly righteous. He lived a life of perfect goodness and love, in mostly ordinary ways until he was around 30. Then Jesus succeeded where, at every point, Israel had failed.

Second, Daniel was ***the faithful son of God***. He maintained his discipline of daily prayer, three times each day. He was devoted and disciplined, a powerful combination. And this pointed ahead to Jesus, the true Son of God, the beloved and begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Finally, Daniel was delivered from certain death, his fate sealed with a heavy stone. But God kept those ravenous lions from harming his son and servant, and in the morning Daniel was lifted out of the lions’ den and his enemies were thrown in and consumed by the deadly lions.

So ***Jesus walked out of the tomb on the third day***, and the great enemies of all people – sin and death and hell – were defeated forever through his all sufficient sacrifice.

Now let’s turn to **Matthew chapter 2**, for the wise men from the east who follow a special star they know indicates the birth of a great king.

“And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.” Matthew 2:9-11

***The wise men read the signs correctly.*** They paid attention to the stars and interpreted what it all indicated: a great king, indeed **THE great king had been born.** And remarkably, unlike any normal star, they were able to follow this particular star straight to Bethlehem where they found Mary and Joseph and the baby.

Now, **usually God doesn’t give people such tangible and specific interventions**. For ***King Darius***, this deliverance of Daniel. ***For the wise men***, a unique star in the night sky. For most of us, we hear about Jesus from parents or friends or Sunday School teachers or youth leaders. But God does intervene in our lives to show us He is there, and He loves us and is with us. God does speak and act in such a way that everyone on the planet knows He exists, and He is powerful.

We know ***King Nebuchadnezzar had two very vivid dreams*** that were God’s way of speaking to him and to God’s people as well. It is well documented that thousands and thousands of Muslims across the middle east are having dreams and visions of the Lord Jesus. I recently heard a podcast about **a man from Pakistan they called Haroon** who was raised a militant Muslim. Very much a Pakistani Saul the Pharisee.

**Open Doors Podcast Episode 6 - Persecution in Pakistan**

<https://www.opendoors.org.au/frontline-faith/episode-6-persecution-in-pakistan/>

Young Haroon ***was worried about his salvation*** because Islam is very strict and doesn’t promise anyone escape from hell apart from very disciplined observance. But the one exception is jihad. If you fight against the enemies of Islam and die in battle for a holy cause, you go straight to heaven. So, Haroon set out to not only become an Imam but to become a martyr, slaying infidels for Allah.

At age 9 you should be playing with toys, but he was sent off to start memorizing the Quran and was not handed toys but ***instead was handed a gun and trained in jihad***. By age 11 he had memorized the entire Quran but couldn’t understand it because it was in Arabic, and he did not know that language. But Islam doesn’t let you ask questions, so he simply pressed on in his studies.

After completing his preparations to become an Imam, Haroon devoted himself to reaching and ***converting young Christians in Pakistan***. He became a successful youth worker, winning many converts and impressing many in the region. So, in his early 20s, Haroon was chosen to go to Greece to lead Muslim outreach in Athens. He opened the first mosque there in Athens in 2005 and another mosque a couple of years later.

While in Greece Haroon **had to take a job** working for an older Christian couple in a shop. He figured it was a good opportunity to convert some more Christians. He told them he would need a place to pray five times each day and they gladly gave him a small space where he would not be interrupted. In fact, Elena would sometimes remind him when he missed one of his prayer times and encourage him to go and pray; and ***she asked him to pray for them and their business.***

This introduced a dilemma for Haroon because when he prayed, he recited the Quran and in praying for Christians like Elena and her husband he was praying that their necks would be sliced and their heads removed as infidels. So, Elena would ask him, “Did you pray for us,” and he would say, “Yes,” but know in his heart that ***he was wishing their deaths*** at his hand for his own salvation.

A couple of years later, Haroon heard about ***a massacre in Pakistan*** of a whole village of Christians. He knew he should celebrate such a victorious jihad but was bothered by the fact that it was an unprovoked attack against unarmed Christians. Then he was called back to Pakistan to help with the public promotion of the execution of a young Christian woman for blasphemy. Her crime? She ***drank a cup of water from a Muslim’s cup*** – which was forbidden by sharia law as blasphemy, demanding the death penalty.

Haroon searched all through the Quran looking for any hope for this woman, **any means of forgiveness**. But as with his youthful fears of hell, he knew there was no such hope in Islam – only the fear of judgment and eternal suffering. Even though her offense was so minor he knew there was no escape for her.

Then, in 2010, **he had a dream**. In the middle of the night, he found himself in a brightly lit room filled with diamonds, jewels and gold. A man in a white robe was there, welcoming him in. He woke up in a sweat but when he went back to sleep, he was right back in that room with the man he knew was ***Jesus inviting him***. And Jesus clearly said, “You need to go to church.”

Haroon had been seeking answers outside of Islam. He had friends who were Sikhs, and others who were Hindu, and he had asked both for insight into the nature of God and salvation. ***And he sincerely prayed to God, asking God to reveal Himself*** wherever He could be found – whether it was Islam, Sikhism or Hinduism.

Haroon knew God could not be found in the polytheism of the Christian Trinity - Jesus could not be divine, that was absurd, that was intolerable, unthinkable blasphemy. But then he thought back to **a day in 2004**, six years before, when he had been walking to a prayer meeting in his mosque where he was being honored as an Imam. He was dressed pristinely in elaborate Muslim robes. He had been well trained in Islamic practices. He knew the entire Quran in Arabic. On his walk to the mosque, he passed an older Christian man sweeping the street. The man was barefoot and dirty, working one of the few jobs available to Christians in Pakistan, who were known to be second class citizens, undeserving of other jobs. This dirty old man asked Haroon for alms, as was common. And Haroon paused to give the man some money. He hesitated because he was not to touch anything unclean in preparation for this prayer service, but he was moved to stop and help the man.

And this older Christian man received the money with gratitude and **asked if he could PRAY for Haroon**, the Imam. Haroon laughed to himself at the absurdity of this situation but spontaneously agreed to let the dirty old infidel pray for him. The old Christian prayed, “Thank you Lord for this generous man and his gift that will let me eat today. ***Show him the way, the truth and the life***, in Jesus’ name, amen.”

Haroon scoffed at what a simple, trite, meaningless prayer. Silly old Christian. And he walked off to his fancy, holy Muslim prayer meeting. But six years later Haroon was stunned by the reminder of this prayer. The way, the truth and the life. ***Islam did not offer anyone hope***, even a young woman who simply drank from the wrong cup. There was no assurance of salvation even for the most devoted Imam.

These Christian shopkeepers in Athens had been so kind and patient and loving to him. And then he had a dream where Jesus Himself told him to go to church. Nervously, Haroon went to Elena and her husband and ***asked if he could go to church***. They happily brought him and soon after he committed his life to Jesus.

Not long after that he was **summoned back to Pakistan** where publicly he continued to serve as an Imam, but secretly he got involved with a small underground church of just 3 or 4 faithful believers. He began to grow in his understanding of Jesus, grace and salvation.

But it was only **a matter of time before he was caught**. And when he was caught, the Muslim extremists broke both legs, both arms, beat him so badly his ribs were broken and his head fractured in numerous places. It took him six months to walk again. Being alive and mobile again was no protection against Muslim extremists. One day an assassin found him in a marketplace and raised an AK47 at him from just 6 feet away. Click. The gun jammed. AK47s are known for their reliability even in bad conditions. They never jam. But God stopped that gun just like he closed the mouths of the lions for Daniel.

Haroon escaped to Iran where he was arrested and placed in jail for two months. He escaped Iran and was detained in jail for another three months in a neighboring country. Finally, eight months later he made it to Germany.

Haroon continues to reach out to Muslims in Europe and around the Middle East. He speaks eight languages and is uniquely equipped to share the message of Jesus with any who will listen. He decided years ago he would not stay in hiding but would stand up for Jesus and share the good news.

Like the wise men in Matthew 2, ***Haroon responded to the light that was given to him***. He listened to his conscience and responded to his Jesus dream. He believed in the message he had been trained his entire life to reject. And then, like Paul the Apostle, devoted himself to preaching the message he once tried to destroy. Even in great suffering, Haroon continues to rejoice in the Lord and present himself in service to King Jesus.

***What is the light God has given you?*** How have you responded to that light? What steps have you taken? How has God shown Himself to be real and powerful and loving? Have you come, like the wise men from the east and found yourself at the feet of Jesus? Bring to Jesus all that you have and all that you are. Lay your gifts before him. And you will find that he opens for you the doorway into every spiritual blessing and the treasure of everlasting life.

The saying is true: Wise men still seek Him. Let’s pray.