

## Faith in Times of Trouble

Lesson for February 18, 2024

### Unit III: The Righteous Live by Faith

**Adult Topic:** Facing Great Danger

**Background Scripture:** Daniel 6:1-28

**Printed Text:** Daniel 6:10-11, 14, 16,19-23, 26-27

**Key verse:** “*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, Your Majesty.*” (Daniel 6:22, NIV)

That great American hero, editor, schoolteacher, and Presbyterian clergyman Elijah Lovejoy left the pulpit and returned to the press in order to be sure his words reached more people. The Civil War might have been averted and a peaceful emancipation of slaves achieved had there been more like him. After observing one lynching, Lovejoy was committed forever to fighting uncompromisingly the awful sin of slavery. Mob action was brought against him time after time; neither this nor many threats and attempts on his life deterred him. Repeated destruction of his presses did not stop him. “If, by compromise is meant that I should cease from my duty, I cannot make it. I fear God more than I fear man. Crush me if you will, but I shall die at my post...” And he did, four days later, at the hands of another mob.

Paul Simon, “Elijah Lovejoy,” *Presbyterian Life*, 18:13

At times, we endure a political climate in which the laws conflict with personal convictions. How do we take a stand against the powers that be? Because of his faith in God, Daniel stood up to King Darius’s unjust decree, even at risk to his own life. (*Sunday School Commentary, 2023-2024*, Townsend Press, p. 223)

### Key Terms

1. **Answered** (verse 12) – Something spoken or written that replied to a question.
2. **Assembled** (verse 11) – Brought together as a group (in a particular place or for a particular purpose).
3. **Decree** (verse 12) – Written commands by rulers having the effect of law.
4. **Prayed** (verse 10) – To address God or a god with adoration, confession, supplication, or thanksgiving.
5. **Thanks** (verse 10) – An expression of gratitude.
6. **Writing** (verse 10) – A document, script or decree.

## Lesson Background

At the end of chapter 5, Belshazzar has died and control over Babylon has come to someone identified as “Darius the Mede.” Darius organizes his territory under 120 satraps and three governor-level officials. The satraps were to be supervised by three high governors. Darius intended to make Daniel the most powerful of those advisors, thanks to his outstanding skill and integrity (Daniel 6:1–3).

The other politicians are jealous of Daniel's success. They scrape for some criticism with which to destroy him, finding nothing. Daniel is just as moral and upright as his reputation suggests. However, he is also known for his devotion to his God (Daniel 1:8, 17, 20). The schemers realize that Daniel will never compromise his faith, even if that means breaking the law (Daniel 6:4–5).

The conspirators are said to approach Darius “by agreement;” the original text is not implying that all 122 came at the same time. Nor does it mean that every one of the satraps and governors were part of the plot. Yet, they certainly appeared in a group. They falsely told Darius that their plan was unanimous—Daniel obviously did not agree. Seeing many of his governors urgently presenting the law likely helped convince Darius that this was a good idea. In Persian culture, the king was the embodiment of the law, and the law was never wrong. Therefore, certain official decrees could not be changed or overturned—otherwise, it would imply the law was contradicting itself. Knowing this is a malicious trap, those scheming against Daniel ensure that Darius makes his proclamation in exactly this way (Daniel 6:6–9). This is where this week's lesson begins.

## Lesson in Depth

### I. A Defiant Faith (Daniel 6:10-11, 14, 16)

**When Daniel learned that the decree was signed:** Daniel was confronted with a test of loyalties. He was a loyal subject of his king, yet he knew that the King of Kings deserved a higher loyalty. Daniel refused to give to the government the measure of obedience that belonged to God alone.

Others perhaps considered it risky for Daniel to pray as was his custom. Daniel knew that the *safest* thing he could do was radically obey God.

It isn't hard to see why people are men-pleasers; it *seems* as if people have the power to hire or fire us, to break our hearts, to slander us, to make our lives generally miserable. The power to obey God and stand for Him comes from a settled understanding that God is really in control.

“Unless you are prepared to be in the minority, and now and then to be called ‘narrow,’ ‘fanatic,’ and to be laughed at by men because you will not do what they do, but abstain and resist, then there is little chance of your ever making much of your Christian profession.” (Maclaren)

**Prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days:** Daniel didn't let the decree change his actions one way or another. He didn't do more praying or less; he simply continued his excellent prayer life.

**Found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God:** They found Daniel just as they knew they would – deep in prayer. For Daniel prayer was both communion with God and pleading for His will to be accomplished (supplication).

**That Daniel, which [is] of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king:** This was not true. Daniel intended no disrespect for the king, only a higher respect for God. The king would not have accepted this accusation if it had been from one person. Several came as witness to this thing Daniel had done. They cleverly put in the fact that Daniel was with the captives of Judah, as if that made him a lesser person. Probably, they used that to say his loyalty lay elsewhere. They are accusing Daniel of ignoring the decree of the king. Not once, but three times a day when he prayed.

At this point, Daniel had lived over 60 years in Babylon. His loyalty to the rulers was well known; in spite of that loyalty, his consistent faithfulness to God brought this threat.

**And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself:** There is a lot to like about King Darius, and one of the admirable things about him is that he was **displeased with himself**. Instead of blaming others, he knew that he was at fault. We can be sure that he wasn't happy with Daniel's enemies, but he knew that ultimately he was responsible.

Like Darius, our foolish decisions often haunt us. Often all we can do is pray and ask God to mercifully and miraculously intervene when we make foolish decisions.

**He labored till the going down of the sun:** This means that he worked as long as he could. According to ancient eastern custom, the execution was carried out on the evening of the day that the accusation was made and found valid. King Darius loved Daniel. He tried to find some way that he could get out of throwing Daniel into the lion's den. Now, the king knew he had been trapped into signing this decree. He had gone from a self-styled god to a fool in one day.

He was angry with himself for signing this into law. He did not immediately do this terrible thing. His hope was there would be some way out of this. Quick decisions get us all in trouble from time to time.

## II. A Vindicated Faith (Daniel 6:19-23, 26-27)

**Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions:** Since he could not sleep, it was easy for Darius to rise **very early**. We imagine him waiting for the first glimmer of dawn so he could see how Daniel fared.

**When he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel:** Darius probably wanted to believe that Daniel's God could save him, but in the physical he knew it would be impossible. He reminds me of the man who came to Jesus to heal his boy. He said, I believe, but help thou mine unbelief. This is the way Darius is here. He wants to believe, but it is hard to believe under these circumstances. He cries out to Daniel, hoping Daniel will answer.

**Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live forever:** When Darius heard Daniel's voice he knew that he had survived through the night.

**My God has sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths:** We don't know if Daniel *saw* an angel or not, but he certainly knew that **God sent His angel** to rescue him. Hebrews 1:14 says angels are *ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation*. God sent an angel to serve Daniel's need.

“How the angel stopped the lions' mouths, whether by the brightness of his presence, or threatening them with his finger (Numbers 22:27, 33), or by making a rumble amongst them like that of an empty cart upon the stones, or by presenting unto them a lighted fire (which things lions are said to be terrified with), or by causing in them a satiety, or by working upon their fantasy, we need not inquire.” (Trapp)

Daniel was preserved through *faith*. Though his cause was righteous, and he was unjustly accused, those things alone did not protect him before the lions. Daniel needed a living, abiding faith in God, even in the most difficult circumstances.

“Though they were savage and hunger-starved, yet Daniel was kept from the paws and jaws of these many fierce and fell lions by the power of God through faith.” (Trapp)

ii. There is an instructive order here. The power of God sent an angel to protect Daniel in response to a prayer of faith coming from a consistent, abiding walk.

**I have done no wrong before you:** Daniel did break the king's law, but he did not go *against* the king or against the king's *best interests*.

**Then was the king exceeding glad for him:** The king's joy was overwhelming. His faith was helped on this day, as well. He has them release Daniel from the den. God protected Daniel in the lion's den.

God openly honored Daniel's faith for the purpose of showing His glory. That is not always the case, as God may choose to be glorified by permitting a trusted servant to be martyred with others, as were the faithful servants. Because of this faith, Daniel is recognized in Hebrews 11:33 as one who by faith *stopped the mouths of lions*.

**I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel:** This is the statement of peace that Darius sent to all the people. This is a statement that Daniel's God is God. Belief in God cannot be legislated, but that is what Darius wants here. He believes, and he wants all of his subjects to believe in the one true God. He probably, does not know Him personally, so he speaks of Him as Daniel's God.

Daniel illustrated the evangelistic potency of a godly, uncompromising life.

**He delivers and rescues, and he works signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions:** Darius is very impressed with Daniel's God, because He did the seemingly impossible, by saving Daniel from the lions.

“*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*” (Psalms 46:1)

Notes collected and developed by Ethel Williams

## Lesson Summary

This week's lesson recounts the story of Daniel in the lions' den, a well-known biblical narrative. From this account we learn:

1. **Faithfulness and integrity:** Daniel's unwavering commitment to his faith is evident in his refusal to stop praying to God, despite knowing it could lead to severe consequences. His integrity in obeying God rather than man serves as a powerful example of faithfulness.
2. **Courage in the face of adversity:** Daniel's courage in continuing to pray, even when faced with the threat of being thrown into a den of lions, demonstrates his trust in God's protection. This serves as a reminder to trust in God's faithfulness and to stand firm in the face of adversity.
3. **Divine protection:** This story highlights God's miraculous intervention on behalf of Daniel. Despite the odds stacked against him, Daniel emerges unscathed from the lions' den, showcasing God's power to deliver those who trust in Him.
4. **Consequences of envy and injustice:** The account also portrays the consequences of envy and injustice. Daniel's enemies plotted against him out of jealousy and were ultimately defeated by their own schemes. This serves as a cautionary tale about the destructive nature of envy and the importance of seeking justice.
5. **Witness to others:** Daniel's experience becomes a testimony to King Darius and all who witness it, leading to the proclamation of God's greatness throughout the kingdom. This underscores the impact of a faithful life on those around us and the opportunity to be a witness for God in all circumstances.
6. **God's sovereignty:** Ultimately, the story of Daniel in the lions' den underscores God's sovereignty over all circumstances. Despite the challenges and dangers Daniel faced, God was in control, and His purposes prevailed.