



THE FIRST SUNDAY OF END TIME - REFORMATION

Light of the Valley Lutheran Church

Saved from the Mouths of Lions

Daniel 6:10-12, 16-23 (NIV84)

¹⁰ Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. ¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. ¹² So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions' den?" The king answered, "The decree stands—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." ¹⁶ So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" ¹⁷ A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. ¹⁸ Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep. ¹⁹ At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. ²⁰ 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?" ²¹ Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! ²² 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, O king." ²³ 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.

While under the rule of a Caesar who blamed all the Roman Empire's problems on Christians, cut them in two, burned them alive, fed them to lions, Paul wrote, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves." (Romans 13:1-2) A couple of decades earlier, the apostles of Jesus stood under discipline before the Jewish ruling council who was demanding that they no longer preach Jesus Christ and what he had done for all people. To this, Peter and the other apostles declared, "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29) Obey the government because God instituted it. Obey God over all authority, including the government. These two teachings collide in the life of Daniel which end up having him thrown into a lions' den.

Daniel in the lions' den is a familiar story to us. It's ranked right up there with David and Goliath, Noah's Ark, and Jonah in the belly of the great big fish. But how did Daniel get into this situation?

We first hear about Daniel when he is about 20 years old and is carried off to Babylon as a prisoner of war around about the turn of the 6th century B.C. He is a smart young man with many talents and a lot of promise. The Babylonians begin grooming him for work within their empire. Daniel quickly rises through the ranks and serves as a trusted advisor for nearly six decades. He was so highly valued that when a new regime took over – the Medes and the Persians – King Darius set Daniel up as one of three administrators of the kingdom who would oversee the 120 satraps - government officials who took care of business in smaller designated areas, kind of like governors. Daniel did so well that the new king was going to make Daniel administrator over the whole kingdom.

As it goes in the world of business, instead of congratulating Daniel, the other governmental officials began looking for ways to bring him down. When they could find no corruption in him and nothing wrong with his actions, they set forth a new plot. They convinced King Darius to make a new law that no one could worship any other person or any other god than Darius for 30 days. The penalty for disobeying the decree: death by lions. The law was made, and by their own rules - the laws of the Medes and the Persians - it could not be repealed.

Up to this point, Daniel had been faithfully serving the government that God had established over him, even though it wasn't his nation or his people – it was an unbelieving ruler over a nation of unbelievers. What should Daniel do with this new decree? Should he give lip service worship of King Darius for a month and grovel before God to forgive him for this willful sinning because really, he didn't mean it? Could he appeal to the king to have this law revoked? (Not an option in the Persian kingdom.) Should he hide his faith for a month? He could spare his life if he just keeps his faith to himself and pretends to be an unbeliever like everyone else.

What would you have done if you were Daniel? What if, God forbid, the U.S. government could make a law that all inhabitants of this nation must bow down and worship the president? (Okay, you can make your cracks that some people are already doing that, but seriously...) What if they attached the death penalty to anyone who did not do this? Yes, it's unconstitutional. Yes, this should never happen in our country, but what if it did? Others have done it in the past. Sinners do sinful things, and that includes our government, who we are called by God to respect and obey. What would you do in a situation like Daniel's? Would you hide your faith? Would you go along with the crowd to spare your life, to make sure that you remained alive and well for your family?

We can talk a lot about what we would do. Maybe we would fold at a moment's notice under pressure like this and go with the crowd instead of standing up for Jesus. Maybe we might surprise ourselves and be ultra-brave and defiant of such an immoral governmental law and worship God regardless. Ultimately, though, we don't really know what we will do until we are actually in that situation. No matter what we would do, though, it's a no-win scenario. Either I submit to my government to disobey God, or I obey God by disobeying the government. A choice must be made. No matter which we choose, we will be sinning.

Sadly, it is inevitable that we get stuck in no-win situations like Daniel. Sometimes we get choices between good and good or good and better or good and bad. But then there are those times when we have to choose between bad and bad, sin or sin. This is how much sin permeates our lives. This is why no one can be perfect by their own will power and choices because all of us have these times when there is no "good" option. Either way we go, we will sin.

Occasionally in a Church History, it comes up that Christians in the past have renounced their faith when facing death for no other charge than being a Christian. The discussion soon turns to, "Can such a person be saved?" Could Daniel have been saved if he would have chosen to hide his faith or if he went along with the worship of the king for 30 days? Can we be saved if we, in such a no-win situation of sin or sin, renounce our faith and openly sin against God in order to save our lives?

It is such a wrestle. We love God. We have chosen to serve him. How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God by bowing down and worshiping a man? How could I deny him after all that he's done for me – giving me life, breathe, family, friends, all that I want to live for? Yet, at the same time, what happens to my family if I invite death over by rebelling against my government who derive their authority from God and God allowed them to come to power? How can I keep my life and remain loyal to God? What do I do when I am stuck in a no-win situation choosing between sin or sin?

Daniel made his choice. "When [he] learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before." (verse 10) Daniel does not even try to hide his choice. He goes up to his room where there are windows that allow his conspirators to see him. He did everything as he had before. He was not going to let the government compromise his beliefs. He chose, as the apostles did, that he must obey God rather than men, even when it means disobeying the government put in authority over him by God. And he is willing to let everyone see him do it.

Daniel knew that God had given him everything that was worth living for and even more than that. God had given Daniel something worth dying for: a sure hope and an unwavering promise that the descendant of King David would come to save the world from sin. As Isaiah had written almost two centuries earlier, this servant king would be pierced for his transgressions, crushed for his iniquities. The punishment that would bring Daniel peace would be upon him. By the wounds of this servant king, Daniel would be healed of his wounds – his spiritual wounds. Jeremiah, an older contemporary of Daniel, spoke for God saying, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:34) Daniel was ready to both live for God and die for God at the mouths of the lions because he knew God would save him. God had declared him innocent by this promise of the suffering Servant King, the Messiah. The suffering servant's future sacrifice made Daniel innocent in God's eyes.

That suffering servant has done the same for us. The prophecies were fulfilled in the God Man Jesus Christ. Because of his perfect life lived in our place, his life given at the cross, his wounds sustained at the hands of sinners, God remembers our sins no more. Even when we are forced to make choices between sin or sin, we have someone who has taken our transgressions upon his shoulders. It is Jesus Christ and he has done this making us just as innocent as Daniel in the eyes of the Lord.

God saved Daniel that day by sending an angel to shut the mouths of the lions. Daniel came up out of the lions' den without a single scratch. His trust in God to save him was rewarded. Even if Daniel had died that day, God would still have saved him by taking him out of a world that forced him to choose between following God and following a government, rescuing him by taking him from this world to his heavenly home.

We pray that we never have to be in that same situation as Daniel, having to choose to either follow the governmental authority that God established or rebel and obey God rather than the government. When it comes down to those no-win situations of sin, we pray for the boldness of Daniel, that we continually serve our God. We pray for his same faith that would move us to entrust our entire lives into God's hands when facing impending death for following his will, confident that one way or another God will save us from the mouths of lions.

Because of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, God finds us innocent in his sight. He will send an angel, either to protect us from the physical harm or to deliver us by bringing us to our heavenly home. God saves us from the mouths of lions for the sake of Jesus, our Servant King, in whom we trust, whom we continually serve. Amen.