

Daniel In The Lions Den
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Today we are talking about Daniel in the Lions Den for our favorite stories of the Bible series. One of you requested this, and I think it's a great story to learn more about. In order to get started, I have another brief story to tell you, that happened more recently about a Mom named Heather and her toddler son Jack.

When Heather Baltzor dressed , Jack, in his new black-and-white striped hoodie and headed for a day at the zoo, she had no idea what excitement he'd stir up—in the lion's den, that is.

Several lions sat lazing about in their enclosed habitat at the Oregon Zoo, completely uninterested, yawning and looking rather bored as toddlers and children of all ages approached the glass to take a peek at the giant cats.

But when Jack approached the glass it was different. Looking like a young zebra in his black and white hoodie, Jack's presence caught one of the lion's attention and the cat quickly jumped into action.

Pounding, pawing, scratching and biting at the glass, the lion tried everything it could to capture its young prey.

Here is a picture of the incident

Almost not cool...right?

Well, the first thing about this incident and the reason it occurred at all is because **JACK looked different than the other people around him**. He looked like a zebra – he was a different breed so to speak. **Zebra Principle #1: CHRISTIANS ARE MEANT TO STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD, EVEN WHEN IT GETS THEM IN TROUBLE** The crux of the story of Daniel is that he did just that. And if you are living the Christian life the way you are meant to live it so will you. None of the teachings of the Christian faith are about blending into the background – fitting into the status quo. All of Christ's teaching

tell us to stand out in the foreground...to be different and make a difference...We will see how Daniel does this...in a minute

The Scripture is very clear that we have an enemy here on earth that seeks the demise of those who follow Christ – who stand out. The Bible calls that enemy Satan or the devil and compares this enemy to a roaring lion.

Jesus said our enemy, Satan, is like a roaring lion prowling around this earth, looking for someone to devour.

We know that his favorite prey are faithful Christians who look differently and act differently than everyone else. (*Believers who look just like the rest of the world and who act just like the rest of the world are of little interest to him*). But believers who are actively engaged in the work of the Kingdom stand out in the crowd.

Daniel did stand out – for a different reason than little Jack did – but that's why he got in trouble with the lions.

What helps in understanding the story of Daniel in the lions den is to know that this incident happened a long time after Daniel was already taken captive from his homeland of Judah - about 600 years before Christ – and exiled to Babylonia. (a very pagan land) He is taken as a young man hostage to serve in a pagan culture...really the worst of the worst place ever for a devout Jew. This happens when King Nebuchadnezzar ruled.

And of all of the people that were taken into exile...and there were many...the Babylonian leaders took a small sample of those Jews that they considered to be the brightest and the best men -, they took them aside and gave them special treatment to them so that they could potentially serve in the Kings court.

We get from scripture that Daniel was very handsome, gifted, and strong. Daniel was among that select sample – the best of the best.

If you read through the book of Daniel (wish I had time to show you) you will find out that time and again, in a pagan land, Daniel stands up for what is right; in a pagan land where there were no standards

and many many gods, and where temptation to do the wrong thing was rampant Daniel sets the standard for Yahweh every time – showing the king that the God of Israel was the one true and faithful God.

Down through the years Daniel does this in miraculous life changing ways, and people grow to respect him and trust him.

By the time this story of Daniel in the lions den takes place, Daniel is at least 80 years old. All those years he had stood up for the Lord in a pagan land - and at this point? He isn't going to back down.

Do you realize how hard that was to do for so long?
After awhile, in a pagan land, with everyone doing it differently, worshipping other gods, engaging in pagan practices there's a good chance of getting brain-washed, by that culture, right?

We'd start to question...how do I know that what I believe is real? No one else believes what I believe...

Why should I keep the standards of God Almighty and follow him, when no one else is doing it?

Ever feel like you are in an alien land in this current culture? I sure do.

Ever get tempted to cheat just a little bit to get ahead? Ever play it safe so that you don't offend someone, even when there is injustice going on?

Ever get scared to talk about the Lord in public, or right a wrong because its not the popular thing to do? I've been tempted in all these ways , and I have stumbled more than I can say.

But In an alien land, away from the supports of home, Daniel never compromises his standards and his absolute trust in the God of Israel. It just amazes me how well does this.

The real lions in the story of Daniel I think are the people serving in the Kings court who then set a trap for Daniel

They know how to do this, precisely because they know who Daniel is...they have been observing him all these years and they are

smart...and *they know that Daniel will never compromise his faith no matter what.*

And they are jealous of Daniel. So they come up with a plan to get rid of him. By this time King Nebuchanezzare is out of the picture and King Darius now rules the Persian empire. And King Darius really likes Daniel.

He respects him. Daniel has proved himself to be wise and trustworthy over and over down through the years. He is by now a distinguished government official someone Darius can rely on.

And King Darius himself has some administrative gifts - he is a man with considerable organizational abilities.

He organizes the entire kingdom into a hundred and twenty provinces and there are princes placed over each one of them. Then, over that 120 provinces and princes he establishes three presidents. Then over them the Bible says Daniel was preferred first. In other words, Daniel was selected to be the prime minister over all of these men with the promise from Darius was that he would soon rule over the entire kingdom.

That kind of power breeds jealousy, envy and crime.

And so these lesser rulers in the Kings court "the satraps" come to Darius and say...

Hey King...you are looking so good today.

How's the family? Maybe catch you later for a game of Persian golf?

Boy you are a great ruler. And oh by the way, since you are so powerful and mighty, we want to make sure people respect you so why not make a decree that anyone who worships any god other than you King for the next 30 days will be thrown to the lions. How bout it king? It will just reinforce to the people your authority.

And Darius is distracted with many things. He might not be fully paying attention.

Sometimes I have so much stuff on my desk I am not always on top of everything either- you know a lot goes on in one day around here at WVPC.- just like many of you know who work in a busy office

Anyway I kind of feel for this king... he might have done sometimes what I do and said...sure...sure...whatever...if you think it's a good idea I'm for it...

And the decree goes into effect....

Darius had no idea of the ramifications of his decision until these same satrap guys come back to him and say...you know Daniel? He worships his God – the God of Israel three times a day... You've made the decree king. You can't change it. Toss him to the lions.

And Darius is caught short. What? He agonizes, and ponders, but he realizes that the way that he wrote the decree means that he cannot revoke it.

ZEBRA PRINCIPLE #2: CHRISTIANS ARE MEANT TO HAVE COURAGE!

The thing that is so funny about that baby in the picture is that he is totally not afraid.

The baby is not afraid because he is oblivious and has no idea of the danger on the other side of that glass.

Our problem is we do know the dangers that are out there, and we do get afraid. I am sure Daniel was afraid, but that didn't affect his behavior one bit. One definition of courage is: **Courage is not about not being afraid. Courage is about being afraid and doing the right thing anyway.**

Daniel probably knew the scripture from the Old Testament that said, **“This is my command--be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).**

So what was Daniel's response to the Kings decree?

Look at this passage from Daniel 6:10

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.

If it had been me...I think I might have been tempted to at least close the windows a little...stand behind the dresser and do my prayers... maybe draw the drapes a bit. Maybe get new drapes made out of a little thicker material perhaps...shut off the lights...leave town?

After all God sees my heart...right.
I don't have to make a public display of my faith...you know how we rationalize things as we compromise ourselves.

But even that little bit of a compromise (to close the windows) was beneath Daniel...he kept doing what he had always done to honor God no matter what schemings or plots were going on against him—even if it meant his life.

Pretty courageous, right?

There's a lot of definitions of courage – I just read one to you - but the one I like the very best is one that GK Chesterton, catholic theologian used long ago. He said, **Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die. 'He that will lose his life, the same shall save it,' is not a piece of mysticism for saints and heroes. It is a piece of everyday advice for sailors or mountaineers.** Its for people willing to take risks and thereby truly live.

John Eldridge adds the following comment: **"The most dangerous people on earth are those who have reckoned with their own death. Everyone dies; few ever really live. Sure, you can create a safe life for yourself ... and end your days in a rest home somewhere.... I'd rather go down swinging. Besides, the less we are trying to 'save ourselves,' the more effective a warrior we will be.**

David was a courageous warrior. Effective too.

And King Darius, reluctantly and after agonizing about this whole scheme that he is now caught in the middle of, has Daniel thrown to

the lions.

Now I want to explain to you what a lions den looked like back then. It was actually a deep pit in the ground, and the lions who lived in the pit were very very hungry. They were fed the bare minimum necessary to keep them alive, so much so that often when victims were tossed down there the bodies never reached the floor. The lions would grab the person in the air as they were falling and rip them to shreds. Then a stone was shoved over the top of the opening of the pit and so it was pitch black in there. And Daniel spent the night, with those kinds of lions, in that kind of dark pit.

Courageous? I would say so. If only he had closed those windows when he prayed he would have avoided all this. But Daniel never compromised.

ZEBRA PRINCIPLE #3: CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO TRUST IN GODS FAITHFULNESS

When I showed my kids the clip, one of them said, “Mom that glass is like the Holy Spirit – protecting that baby.”

I thought that was clever – because when you truly look different from the world and stand out for God courageously– you can TRUST in Gods faithfulness to you through it all.

On that day, when Daniel was thrown to the lions, scripture tells us that God sent his angel and closed their mouths

Friends, our refuge is in the Lord...

That’s why we can be different, and act courageously...

Our faithfulness to God is nothing compared to his faithfulness to us. And that doesn’t mean that bad things don’t happen – the enemy at roaring lion- will attack and we will go through trials.

But ultimately God is faithful, and will work out his purposes in our lives for his glory.

And the more we trust that, the more we are able to live courageous, uncompromising lives.

Daniel trusted God...he trusted God when he was a child taken hostage by the Babylonians
He trusted God when he was a distinguished governor ruling over Persia
And he trusted God when he was thrown to the lions...
Even though he lived almost his entire life in an alien land
He never stopped trusting his God

With agony and horror King Darius gives Daniel over to the lions.
May the God whom you serve continuously rescue you...he says...to Daniel right before he relinquishes him to the lions. And then he seals the stone covering the opening to the lions den with his ring...

King Darius isn't able to sleep a wink all night, or eat. He refuses any entertainment – he paces up and down - and at the first crack of dawn he rushed out to the pit of lions and
He orders his attendants or guards to move the stone away...and peering down into the ground...into that dark cavernous pit
He calls out tentatively...Daniel?

Who knows? Perhaps King Darius had been praying that night to the God Daniel worshipped – we don't know
But the very fact that he calls out Daniel's name tells me that he has a mustard seed of faith
That maybe Daniel had somehow survived this ...

Daniel? Daniel? The king calls out again. Are you down there? To quote Scripture he says “**Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?**”

Can you see him looking down, scanning the darkness hoping to see something resembling a human being walking, moving, anything?

The King holds his breath...and notices

Notice how Darius doesn't call Daniel his, King Darius' servant, but rather Daniel was known as God's servant first...

And also, another indication of Darius' faith, that Daniel did not serve a dead God but a living God

And then to the Kings delight he hears a voice, a human voice, answering him from the darkness of that deep pit...calling him up to him with strength and confidence

²¹ **“May the 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, Your Majesty.”**

The name Daniel actually means “God is my judge”. Interesting in light of Daniels innocence which he proclaims here. Nowhere in the book of Daniel is his Babylonian name used which was Beltashar. Rather Daniel was defined by his faith and played to an audience of one...God...God who was his judge...his definition...and the one who had his full loyalty and service.

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.**

Many Biblical scholars have suggested a parallel to the story of Jesus in the tomb.

The cross was necessary but in the end God’s purposes were fulfilled as the stone was taken away and the living God whom Jesus served all his days on earth was glorified.

I don’t know what lions might be in your life today. Things that threaten you, worry you, people who are hostile or who have betrayed you.

Maybe you are being tempted to compromise because of fear
Maybe you have been standing up for something or someone for a long time – doing the right thing and you are tired and want to give up. You want to blend in.

Maybe the environment you are working in or living in is very atheistic – just like the kind of environment Daniel lived in all his life - and you are having a hard time being Christian in that context.

I want to encourage you to continue to be a Daniel – to continue to stand out as a Christian, to continue to have courage, and to continue to trust in the living God. As you are faithful to the Lord, He will be faithful to you. That’s always the way the story ends for the true Christian. God is always faithful every time, always, in every situation-

Jesus knew this truth when he went to the cross. It’s the only way he could make that journey.

He trusted God every step of the way, in his ministry to us here, and then finally up to the hill where he was crucified. In the end guess what? God was faithful. Just as the stone over the lions den sealed Daniel inside, so there was a stone that was also sealed over the entryway to the tomb with Jesus inside. Both were thought dead. When the stone was removed...both were found alive.

Because...**“Greater is He that is in us than he (that roaring lion) who is in the world!” (1 John 4:4).**

May he shut the lions mouths in your world today, and may you uncompromisingly, and courageously trust in Gods faithfulness completely.

To God be The Glory Forever and Ever...Let us pray...

