

Despair or Hope? Week 4 The Lion's Den

By Pastor Mandy Barkhaus

We're in the last week of our series on Daniel. And here's kind of what we learned from the book of Daniel so far. First of all, Daniel and his friends, they remained faithful even though they were exiled from their homeland. They remain faithful by not eating the king's food or drinking the king's wine. And they gained God's favor because of this.

So, Daniel interprets King Nebuchadnezzar's dream and, this dream of this future kingdoms, and he's kind of humbled by it. We see some humility after a fall from pride of King Nebuchadnezzar. That was last week. Pastor Maddie's message to us about repenting, right. Turning back to God when we fall in that same trap as Nebuchadnezzar did.

Then, we we learned about, Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And they were put in this fiery furnace because they refuse to worship this idol. Now, I was called out after that message because I didn't finish the story. I left these three friends in the furnace. And so if you're not following along in the book of Daniel.

Yes, they made it out of that fiery furnace thanks to their faithfulness and to to God. Of course. So sorry for the suspense if you've been having it for the last couple weeks now in chapter six by chapter six, and we're we're on the fourth king that is mentioned in the book of Daniel and I mentioned in the very first weekend of this sermon series that the timeline begins in.

Some of the details don't really match up to what we know about history, and scholars agree. Theologians agree that that the the story of Daniel is likely a fictional story, but it was put in our Bible. It was chosen to be part of the canon for a reason, because there is a lot we can learn from the story of Daniel and from the person of Daniel.

So in chapter six, King Darius is in charge. So here's chapter six. Starting at verse one, Darius decided to appoint 120 chief administrators throughout the kingdom and to set them over three main officers to whom they would report, so that the king wouldn't have to be bothered with too much. That's why, one of these main officers was Daniel.

Because of his extraordinary spirit, Daniel soon surpassed the other officers and the chief administrators, so much so that the king had plans to set Daniel over the entire kingdom as a result, the other officers and the chief administrators tried to find some problem with Daniel's work for the kingdom, but they couldn't find any problem or corruption at all.

Because Daniel was trustworthy, he wasn't guilty of any negligence or corruption. Here we are. This is a fight for power. That sound familiar? Things we've experienced in our country and our world throughout history. This fight for power and Daniel's rise to power doesn't sit well with the people who's who's been he's been promoted above they. They want him out.

They don't want him to be in charge. Now, you would think that having a strong moral character, being trustworthy, and living a consistent, godly lifestyle would be something the people would desire in a king, but they don't. They want him out not because he's corrupt, but because they want the power now. So they devise a plan to take control, and Daniel's character shows us what it's like to live a life the way the New Testament tells us to live.

In Galatians five, we have the fruit of the spirit, where, by the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And in Galatians says, there's no law against these things. First Peter 2:12 says, live honorably among unbelievers. This is what Daniel's doing today. They defame you as if they were doing evil.

But in the day when God visits and judge, they will glorify him because they have observed your honorable deeds. Now, in our world today, it seems that we cannot agree on what an honorable deed is. And as it relates to being a follower of Jesus, is it upholding the law? Is it showing mercy? Where does this land that well, sometimes doing the right thing puts a target on your back because money and power and fame or control get in the way.

And we as, as a society, we want to knock those people down when they do the right thing. If it means that we might lose our control or our power. So we'll often follow someone morally corrupt if it means we get what we want. And it seems like we say, well, all politicians are morally corrupt, all billionaires, all people living in this country, or that country and and for for the most part, it seems like you know what we see and hear and read on the news.

It feels like that like, is there anyone who is living their lives honoring God like Daniel did? And if so, are we willing to follow them, even if that means we might lose some of our power? So here, these others, these other men, they are envious of Daniel, they're jealous of Daniel, and they're unwilling to follow him because he's trustworthy.

So they divide, they devise a plan. So again, starting at chapter verse five, so these men said, we won't find any fault in Daniel unless we can find something to use against him from his religious practice. So these officers and chief administrators gang together and went to the king. They said to the king, long live King Darius.

All the officers of the kingdom, the ministers, the chief administrators, the royal associates and the governors advised the king to issue an edict and enforce a law that for 30 days, anyone who says prayers to any God or human being except you, Your Majesty, will be thrown into the pit of lions. Now, Your Majesty issue the law, signed the document so that it cannot be changed as per the law of media in Persia, which cannot be annulled.

Because of this, King Darius signed the document containing the law. Now here the plan is in place. They have this plan and they're using Daniel's own faith as a weapon. And we see this today, don't we? People are using Bible verse verses thrown out, sometimes even thrown out to, to, out of context to support harm or to support knocking other people down.

So here, King Darius, he signs this law that will have consequences that even the king doesn't know about yet. So this edict is put into place. Anyone who prays to any other god, to any other person beside the king, will be thrown into the lion's den. And finally, after four long weeks in this sermon series on Daniel in the lion's den, we have sight of the lion's den.

It's a story that most of us have heard if we grew up in the church. You grew up in Sunday School. I grew up in the church, so I remember this story from Sunday School. I the lions didn't seem too scary to me when I was, in this Sunday school version, I think it was like they were made out of felt right, felt little lions put on this felt board.

So I grew up mostly in Omaha, and I grew up going to the Omaha Zoo and seeing the lions there in the zoo and even even those lions, the real life lions didn't feel like such a threat, right? More threatening than the little felt lions. But, you know, through the glass, they didn't seem like much of a threat.

Now, some of my aunts and uncles and cousins lived in Lincoln when I was growing up. And so when I was young, I get it. I got to go to Lincoln and spend time here with with my, my cousins. And one time they brought me to the Lincoln Zoo and I met Leo, the paper eating lion. Now, I remember going home and I was like, Mom and Dad, you'll never guess what I saw.

It was this paper eating lion and it was so cool. And and then 30 years or so I went by since I last saw Leo. And then I got the call in 2022 that I was moving to Lincoln. And oh, and then we moved and we got settled in and I was so excited to see not Memorial Stadium, not the Mammoth Hall, but Leo, oh, the paper eating lion.

So in 2023, my nieces came and I got to bring them to the zoo and I got to show them Leo. They were excited, but not quite as excited as I was about, this lion. So this cute little innocent paper eating lion, that's kind of the Sunday school version of the story, but. But what Daniel faced were real lions, like real hungry lions that he was face to face with.

And it's a little bit of a different story, a different story that children can't quite comprehend. You know what it means to to be faced with fear or danger in their lives. At least that was my experience growing up as a child. I didn't have those kind of fears, but we know that there are some children in in our own community, in our own country that have this incredible kind of fear.

They know they've lived this incredible fear. When we think about some of our, some of the kids who came, out of homes into the foster care system, we think about some of these children who have been, exiled from their own countries, countries that were full of violence and war and poverty, see, pain and suffering and scary situations.

No, no age limit. Anyone can be faced with these kind of fears. So what do we do when we are faced with these trials in life? Or we know that other people are faced with these things? Well, we learn from Daniel and we order our lives so that our routines and our activities help us put our trust in God.

So back to Scripture, starting at verse ten, when Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went to his house. Now his upper room had open windows that faced Jerusalem. Daniel knelt down, prayed, and praised his God three times that day, just like he always did. Just then, these men, all gang together, came upon Daniel praying and seeking mercy from his God.

Then they went and talked to the King about the law. Your Your Majesty, why didn't you sign a law that for 30 days any person who prays to any God or human besides you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into a pit of lions. Then the king replied, the decision is absolutely firm. In accordance with the law of media in Persia, which cannot be annulled now.

Before Daniel even faced the lions, he faced two pressures that all believers face every single day. And these are sins of commission, doing what we know is wrong and sins of omission failing to do

what we know is right. And for Daniel, the sins of commission would have been bowing to the king and the sins of omission would have been stopping his prayers for God.

And we have these in our in our daily life, right? Of course, there's a spectrum of different sins that we can talk about, but some of our sins that we might face with on a day to day basis, sins of commission, you know, doing things that we know are wrong. Lying at work, gossiping about a friend, cheating on a test, lashing out in anger, watching inappropriate content, driving aggressively out of anger or otherwise taking credit for someone else's work, breaking a promise intentionally, and then some of the sins of omission that we face on a day to day basis might look like avoiding someone in need, staying silent about injustice, skipping prayer or Bible study

or worship, not offering forgiveness. Not helping a neighbor in need. Failing to stand up for someone. Being mistreated. So Daniel Daniel didn't choose. He didn't. He chose neither. Like he remained faithful to God, praying openly despite knowing the risks and consequences. His faith. Daniel's faith, didn't depend on favor circumstances that he knew God was going to provide, but rather his faithfulness came from knowing that God's presence was there with him at all times.

So Daniel said, I'm going to keep doing things that I know are right, and I'm going to keep doing the things that I know are wrong. I'm not going to do the things that I know that are wrong. Now, you could say that prayer got Daniel into this situation, but as you'll see in a little bit, prayer will get him out of this situation as well.

So here these men, these jealous men of Daniel, they they went to the king, right? They had they had planned this all along. They went to the king and they're like King Daniel was praying to his God. And the king had had signed this edict. But he wants to save Daniel. In verse 14 it says that the king wants to rescue Daniel.

And then and then verse 15, the men who had ganged up on him, they said, you know what? Remember, this is too late. You signed the edict. It's it's signed. It cannot be annulled. So into the lion's den, Daniel goes and the king says to Daniel, he doesn't. He doesn't ask this as a question. But he says to Daniel, the God, the one you serve will rescue you.

So the pit of lions, with Daniel in it, is sealed up. The king can't sleep that night because he's so nervous about what's going to happen to Daniel. And in the morning, the king wakes up and he goes to Daniel, and he says, he cries out. He calls out to the in front of the den and he says, did your God save you?

So then Daniel responds, Daniel answered the King, long live the king! My God sent his messenger, who shut the lion's mouth. They haven't touched me because I was judged innocent before. My God, I haven't done anything wrong to you either, your Majesty, the King was thrilled. He commanded that Daniel be brought up out of the pit, and Daniel was lifted out.

Not a scratch was found on him because he trusted in his God. The king then ordered that the man who had accused Daniel be brought and thrown into the lion's pit, including their wives and children. They hadn't even reached the bottom of the pit before the lions overpowered them, crushing all their bones. Then King Darius wrote the following decree to all the peoples, nations, and languages inhabiting the entire earth.

I wish you much peace. I now issue this command in every region of my kingdom. All people must fear and Revere Daniel's God because he is the living God. He stands firm forever. His kingship is indestructible, indestructible. God's rule will last until the end of time. He is rescuer and Savior. God performed signs and miracles in heaven and on earth.

Here is the proof he rescued Daniel from the lion's den. Daniel's faith is, It is Daniel's faith in God's presence is is created peace and hope, not only for Daniel, but his faith in God's presence created peace for others as well. And in the end, this story teaches us that those who are corrupt will stand before God.

Daniel's faithfulness to God in the face of the lion's den is a testament to his. His choice to trust in God. So how about us? Do we have that same trust in God now, our baptismal vow. We've been talking about each one each week. And, this third one says this. Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior?

Put your whole trust in his grace and promise to serve him as your Lord in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations and races? And if we say yes to this vow, it means that we do our best to live our lives as a witness to our faith. And as we wrap up this sermon series on Daniel today, I want to leave you with a question that Daniel story invites us to wrestle with.

Do you believe God's presence is with you even when the outcome is uncertain? Now, maybe, maybe, maybe I never told you the ending of that story and you never knew if Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego ever got out of that. That furnace, can you still trust in God's presence? See, Daniel didn't know that he was going to survive the lion's den, but he trusted God's unchanging presence.

His faith wasn't dependent on circumstances, but on the assurance that God was with him throughout it. So how about you? Do you trust God that God is with you in the midst of your struggles, even when the outcome is unknown? Unknown? So here are two steps that you can take this week to to continue to, to learn about and grow your trust in God.

Daniel prayed consistently three times a day. He had this upper room where he would go and set aside time every single day this week, and I challenge you to take a step of faith by by committing to a daily practice. If you don't have one already, of saying prayers or reading scripture, start with 5 or 10 minutes a day, dedicating a time to acknowledge God's presence in your life.

No matter what it is you're facing. And then the second thing is, Daniel didn't hide his faith, even when it meant it meant risking everything. What bold step might God be calling you to take this week? Maybe it's standing up for someone. Maybe it's offering forgiveness. Maybe it's letting go of control of a situation that you or that you might be facing.

Whatever it is, step out in faith, knowing and trusting that God is with you in this time. When we live like Daniel, trusting in God's presence and walking faithfully despite knowing the the outcome, we become living witnesses of God's power and grace. And next week we'll start a whole new brand new sermon series, and we'll dive into what it looks like to be a witness.

This is Jesus's command for us to to to be a witness in the world, living out this baptismal vow. So I'll ask you again, do you believe God's presence is with you, even if the outcome is uncertain? And the

question isn't just for Daniel story, but it's for our story to let's pray. God, we confess. That when things are uncertain, when the outcome is unknown, our faith can be a little bit shaky.

So help us to trust in your promise to know that you are a friend. That you are our savior. Even when we can't see the outcome. God, like Daniel, give us the courage to stand firm, to do the right things, that we know what we are supposed to do, and to avoid the things that we know that we shouldn't do.

God, there, there is this peace that comes from recognizing God, that you are God and that you are with us. So help us and give us the right ways, the right things to do in our lives to help us grow closer to you. And we say all of this in Jesus's name, Amen.