

# CCH sermon 12<sup>th</sup> June 2022 Daniel 6. In the Lion's Den

let's re read v27 p892

"He [the living God of Daniel] rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

- I'd like to start with a **question**. **Do you believe that God is in control?**
  - Its easy to believe that in church.
    - We've just sung..."Our God is a great big God"
  - But I mean do you **really** believe that God is in control.
    - When the phone rings with bad news.
    - On the way to hospital in an ambulance.
    - When your marriage is in meltdown
    - As you turn over the exam paper.
  - Do you believe that **God really is in control!**  
(or in the title of our series that Heaven Rules).
- Think of the biggest problem in your life at the moment. I think if we are honest we are a bit like that dad in Mark's gospel. "I believe, help my unbelief". Well let's pray that this chapter will help us to believe that God really is in control.

## PRAY

- Daniel in the Lions' den. It's a classic story, you'll find it in most Children's bibles along with Noah's ark and David and Goliath, and the parallel passage from chapter 3 the fiery furnace.
  - But this is an adult story! For a start, if it was a film it would be 18-rated for violence- look at verse 24, one of the most bloodthirsty verses in the OT.
  - And it's also an adult story because it contains a lesson that I think takes a lifetime to learn. A lesson that has come again and again in this book....  
God really is in control.
  - I need to know that. You need to know that
  - Daniel needed to know that as he was about to be flung like raw steak into a den of starving carnivores. **God really is in control.**
  - It's a lesson we're going to see four times in this chapter as we work through 4 "acts" of the story.
  - But before we get there, just a quick **overview** of where we have come to. **2 languages. V shaped Structure. Parallel ch6 with ch3.**

## **1) ACT 1: v1-9 The advisors scheming ignores that God really is in control**

- In v1 it is 539BC and we meet King Darius. We'll see him again later in Daniel.
  - He is the new king who has taken over from the Babylonians
    - (3<sup>rd</sup> Ruler we've met- they do seem to come and go!),
    - They look important at the time.
    - Some last for 70+ years like our Queen, but they come and go!
  - Darius has read all the management books and has set up a pyramid structure beneath him so that the economy goes well.
  - 120 managers, with 3 administrators above them. Daniel is one of them.
  - And like in chapter 1 Daniel has risen to the top not- through wheeling and dealing but through careful and steady exercise of his God given gifts.
  - And he's about to be made prime minister.
- But v4 the other 2 chief ministers don't like this.
  - Maybe it's jealousy, maybe they are corrupt, and he is about to expose them. Whatever it is, they don't like Daniel rising above them.
  - So in v4 there's a power struggle, and they want to cut him down.
  - So they hatch a cunning plan to bump him off. That's what you do when you want to be in control, and someone else is.
- But they can't dig up any dirt on him.
  - What a beautiful thing when in the workplace, believers are known for their absolute integrity. Keeping their word, obeying their boss, getting on with the job rather than being on their phone in office hours.
  - So the only thing that will convict Daniel must be related to his faith.
- So v6-9 here comes the cunning plan.
- The plan appeals to the King's pride.
  - Being God for a month. Having everyone worship him. It's quite intoxicating.
  - But it's quite ironic, because though these officials suggest the new edict, they don't worship the King.
  - This new King-religion was a vehicle to get their own way. They worshipped themselves.
  - They wanted to get rid of Daniel so that they can carry on being lazy or corrupt or important, or so that they could have a chance at being prime minister.

- Don't be surprised when you find people using religion to get their own way. Politicians going to church just before an election. On the surface people are promoting their God, but actually their God is themselves. //
- We need to be careful too, that we serve Christ rather than wanting him to serve us. We all have a push inside us to be on the throne. To take God's place. It's called sin. We may put someone else on the throne for a while, but it's just a vehicle for advancing our name.
- (If you have a job at the moment) I wonder whether your activities in the workplace are more like Daniels' or more like the advisors.
  - Do you look up? Do you stop to pray about your work? Or do you scheme for your gain? We thought a lot about serving vs being served last Sunday.
- IF you think you are at the top then you won't think you are accountable to anyone and you will scheme for your own ends. And when you do that you ignore that God really is in control.

But there's another player in the story who does look upwards.

### **ACT 2- v10-18 Daniel's prayers understand God really is in control.**

- v10
- Now remember Daniel around 80 by now! Just in case any of you think there is such a thing as retirement in the Xn life, there isn't! Like Daniel, like Moses there's work to be done well into your latter years! We don't retire from godly Christian service.
- And while there are long periods of fairly uneventful activity where there's not much to report and we just need to be faithful.
- there are big test times too.
  - ch1, vegetables.
  - ch3 fiery furnace.
  - ch6 Lions Den.
- A aged man who knows that **God- the God of his people** is really in control.
- And how do we know that he knows that? Because he prays, even when it hurts. You only pray if you think God is in control.
- Now remember. For over 60 years he's had his prayer time in his top room facing Jerusalem. That's because Jerusalem is where he belongs, it's where he's going back to- his true Home- God's City. And he knew as Solomon did in 1 Kings

8:48 that if his people repent of their sins and pray towards this city, he will look after them. In fact in chapter 9 we'll look at one of these prayers prayed around this very time.

But now some civil servants have made a stupid rule that you can't pray to any God except Darius, or you'll be sausage meat. What do you do?

What would your advice for Daniel be?

- Er Daniel, can't you just out of sight today?
- Can't you just pray in your head. God will still hear.
- It's only for 30 days.
- Look we are nearing the end of this exile- a few more years and we'll be home. Don't rock the boat now.
- You're too important to God's people to be eaten by lions!

But no. Look at verse 10, esp the last 6 words.

<sup>10</sup> 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**.

Daniel is not going to let anything get in the way of his prayers. He's not going to stop praying. And he's not going to stop praying publicly.

He's not going to stop praying, because though the King (or rather his crafty advisers who have devised this scheme) may have power to kill him, God has even greater power. If you believe God is big and can change things, then nothing is going to stop you praying.

But why be so public? But why not pray secretly? God would still hear. Well think of the neighbours. For sixty years they've see him up in his window having his quiet time. But the edict comes along and he stops. What would they say? Oh- Daniel is a fair-weather prayer. He'll do it when it suits, but not when he is in danger of his life. His God can't be that important to him- probably the kind of God who you can't really rely on in a crisis. Maybe a God just like all the home-made gods around us.

NO! Daniel knows that there is a God in heaven who is BIG. Who exists. Who can change things. For 60 years he has proved himself Wonderful, gracious, powerful, and above all in control. And praying reaches the one who really is in control. And praying publicly tells people this.

☞ I wonder if we really think prayer is this important. That we don't want anything to stop it. Not TV, not a lie in, not revision.

I wonder if we got this right in lockdown. Closing our churches and praying online. I think it was the right thing to do. But I wonder how seriously we take praying and praying publicly.

I don't find it easy to pray. I always find a wikipedia article that is more interesting during my daily time to pray. I don't really want to come to the prayer meeting on the second Wednesday of the month and looking at the attendance compared to lifegroups it's clear to see our priorities (I don't say that to make anyone feel bad).

And I guess the times I don't pray are because I think I am in control. But it's stupid. God made the universe. He rules history. He can make a difference. And if God is in control, you talk to him about stuff that he can make a difference with. And getting into the habit, and always doing it, is a good way of preparing for when it's difficult!

Well, back to the story. We've heard what happens. Daniel is marched off to the Lion's den, and thrown in. Literally thrown. And v16 the King breaks his own edict, and starts praying to Daniel's God! But it looks like Daniel is dead meat. And the stone is rolled over the tomb, and sealed with a ring. And the King is gutted and spends a very restless night. Act 2.

***Daniel's prayers understand that God really is in control.***

Well let's move onto Act 3. Perhaps the most important one in the story.

### ACT 3: v17-24 Daniel's rescue proves that God really is in control.

What a scene. It's so brilliantly told.

▲ A few years ago I listened to a radio programme about people who keep dangerous animals as pets. One couple in the States had several big cats in cages in their back yard, lions tigers, cheetahs. One time their owner was cuddling up to the cage and talking nonsense about how cute and misunderstood they were when with a tiger swiped at her and tore a finger clean off her. Another guy had a pet hippo who ate him alive. You don't mess with giant carnivores. Don't believe me? Borrow our planet earth DVD if you want to see Lions attacking a herd of elephants. And here there's a whole pit of them, and he's just landed on them. Daniel is in the lion enclosure without an exit route.

So no wonder the king has been tossing and turning all night. His right hand man's body parts are probably now slowly digesting in the stomachs of big cats. So he comes to check just to put himself out of misery V19.

<sup>19</sup> At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. <sup>20</sup> 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?"

I love it. Wouldn't you like to be a film director making this movie? I would have someone like Danny Devito as the King with his little legs come running as fast as they can carry him down to the den. He may be the king, but he's helpless. And then v21 out of the silence and darkness the voice of Russell Crowe or Bruce Willis comes echoing out like some scene out of Gladiator. "May the King live forever". He's alive!

God himself has protected Daniel. Just like the 3 men in the fiery furnace, (which we looked at with Ian a few weeks ago), God was with Daniel. He sent his angel. He didn't remove Daniel from the trial, but he was right by his side in it. It's a good model for us. We may still face tough times, But God is with us.

God rescues his people. God vindicates his people. I'm not saying it's always going to be easy, or that we will always be rescued from hard things. In fact later in the book God sometimes delivers his people **by death**, rather than **from death**.

So this is no promise that we will be saved from cancer, unemployment or persecution. But it tells us that God is in control.

And he **will** deliver his people, either in this life or the next.

There are some things in this life that look so impossible. As impossible as putting your head in a hungry lion's mouth and it not being bitten off. Our battle with sin feels so impossible. Our struggles with illness, loneliness, depression, injustice. They look impossible.

But God WILL rescue. And why should we of all people know this? Because we live after a greater miracle. Daniel, an innocent was unfairly tried and condemned, executed, sent to the place of death. A stone was sealed over his tomb.

We have the privilege of knowing the truth about another man who was unfairly tried, condemned, executed, sent to the place of death and a stone was sealed over his tomb. But when Peter and John came running to Jesus' tomb at the break of the new dawn, it wasn't to the tomb of a man who had escaped death, it was to the tomb of a man who had clearly gone into death and out the other side.

And you may not face lions, you may face the cancer or the covid ward. But Christ will raise you up out of your grave as alive as Daniel and as alive as Jesus if you put your trust in him.

It's sounds so impossible. It's so unlikely. And yet it's true. And like Darius, people around you might see your faith and start singing a different tune, and living a different life.

And that brings us onto our final scene.

**ACT 4: v25-28. The king's edict declares that God really is in control.**

It's a great ending isn't it. Daniel has been rescued, the baddies have been pulverised, and God has done it. No wonder Darius has changed his tune.

In fact he is so convinced that God is the true God now, that he sends a new edict across his kingdom, and by the look of things to other kingdoms too, saying that there is a bigger Kingdom. He knows he is not the King.

He is not in control. God is. He is just here for a while like all others, but there is a God in heaven who LIVES and RULES and RESCUES.

Well as we conclude...

What trials are you facing? What makes you worry, or cry, or fret?

What looks impossible?

Know this dear friends, inscribe it on your heart... GOD REALLY IS IN CONTROL.

Heaven Rules.

Our God is the God of answered prayers, of resurrections, of rescues.

➡ And since he is. Let's do the right thing, even if it hurts. Stand by your principles. Don't compromise. Don't stop praying.

➡ And do you want your friends to know that God is in control. Well show them in your actions and your words that there is a God who rescues, and maybe they too will change their tune.

**Let's pray.**