

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: OT Southern Style

Part 3 Daniel and the Lion's Den

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend August 15/16, 2009

Good morning. Well, we're going to study that Old Testament narrative this morning. It's found in Daniel Chapter 6. I want you to take your Bible. Let's turn there together. If you don't have your Bible it's important for you to follow along with this story because we're going to be inching our way through verse by verse. It's found on page 743 in the rack Bibles that are right in front of you. Go ahead and grab one of those if you didn't bring a Bible. What we're going to be doing is we're going to be looking at this very familiar passage but we're going to be doing it in detail and like so many Old Testament stories that we all know, many times we can miss the gems that are buried within these stories and so we're going to work our way through this story and I'm just going to be picking out some things I want you to see but the primary thing that we're going to learn this morning is the power of a righteous life. We're going to see that in so many different levels that ultimately when we come to the end of the story we're going to have opportunities of how we can make application into our own personal lives today. I'm going to talk more about that towards the end but I want you to begin thinking about it—the power of a righteous life.

We're going to start in Daniel chapter 6 and by the time you get to the sixth chapter of Daniel, about sixty years of history has gone by so let me help you with where we're at in the history of the nation of Israel; the history of the world at the particular time. We're going to see in chapter 6 a great shift of power, of world power. In 605BC king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar came to power and he conquered Jerusalem. When he did that he began to deport the people into slavery. He did it through three major deportations. But Nebuchadnezzar was wise. He knew that if he was going to, basically, infiltrate this country and assume them in to the Babylonian culture he would have to do it over time. There was a million-plus people that was involved in this deportation. So, he chose to deport the young men and women, especially the young children and teenagers of nobility first. Daniel was a part of this first deportation. You say why would he do this? Well, Nebuchadnezzar was sly in his leadership. He knew if he was going to bring that many people into his culture that he was going to need to have people who understood their background in the places of government. And so he brought these young teenagers in to basically indoctrinate them into the Babylonian culture, Babylonian ideas so that when the people began to come in they would have their representatives. Well, this lasted for about sixty, sixty-six years or so then 539 everything changed. The Persians came in and under King Darius, basically took control from the Babylonians; put everything in a tail spin. Here we see God's hand though, sovereignly move because Daniel assumes an important role.

You see, under the Babylonian kingship he not only started as a teenager but he rose to the ranks of extreme importance. God used him in ways being able to understand dreams of the king. To be able to be a man of great administrative power and under the kingship of the Babylonians he was well used. Well, you would think that would end with the

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change of power but Darius knew of them, of this man's reputation and chose to use him again. So, again we see Daniel in a position of power and influence and that's basically where chapter 6 begins. So, what I'm going to do is I'm just going to work through, I'm going to be stopping occasionally and I'm going to bring out some information so it rounds out the story, you're understanding of Daniel and the lion's den.

Beginning in verse 1 we read it please Darius to set up over the kingdom a hundred and twenty satraps to be throughout the whole kingdom and over them three presidents. Now you need to understand that a satrap was like a governor so there was a hundred and twenty divisions under his world power. Three presidents. Now, remove the concept of the American president from your mind. These are more like chief governors. These were over the satraps. It says in verse 2, over them three presidents of whom Daniel was one to whom these satraps would give an account so that the king might suffer no loss. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him and the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. Now, stop right there. One of the things you might have missed in the history in helping you understand what was going on was Daniel's age. Now, I stop here and I bring this up because if you come from a church background and you went to say, Sunday school then you probably are familiar with Daniel. They've got pictures of him as a young, strapping man, usually in the middle of a lion's den or if you're from that era of flannel-graphs, you know they talked about Daniel. Daniel was not a young man at this point. You remember if he was transported as a teenager, under Babylonian rule sixty some odd years go by before Darius is likely he's now in his late seventies or early eighties. I bring that up really for a select group of you because I know there are some of you who are crossing into that age of retirement. You know, our modern, American mindset is that when we retire it's time to take it easy. You know, that's not how God always sees it. God has a plan for your life – all of your life. That's clear when we see this unfold in Daniel's life. You know, he went through this power change and he could have said you know what; I'm going to take it easy. I served my time. I'm just going to relax a little bit. No, he moved in there and he was used by God to do great things. We're going to see that.

I was reading of a man who did a study and it was an analysis that showed nearly eighty percent of the world's greatest figures closed their lives between age fifty-eight and eighty. He writes consider what has been done by men beyond eighty. Michele Angelo by age eighty-nine executed his last judgment. That's the painting of the Sistine Chapel. John Wesley preached with almost undiminished eloquence at eighty-eight. Edison was still inventing at age ninety. Frank Lloyd Wright at ninety was considered a creative architect. Shaw was writing plays at ninety. J.C. Penney, which by the way was a great Christian man was still working in his company at age ninety-five. And we could go on. We could talk about Ford, Henry Ford and many others. But here's the point. And Wendell brought this up a few weeks ago, in case you missed you. He's actually a great

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example. Wendell Anderson, who is our pastor of stewardship here, he had a productive career in General Motors until a couple years ago he retired. And instead of just going into retirement he sought the Lord and said what you do want me to do with the last half of my life and he made this career change into ministry. Prepared for it by going to Seminary and things like that. He spoke about it just a few weeks ago. Is that God can use you regardless of what age in amazing ways. This is what we're going to see in Daniel's life. And this is just one. Many areas that Daniel represents, a sense of power of a righteous life.

Alright, I got off track a little bit but let's catch back up. Verse 4, then the presidents and the satraps sought to find ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault because he was faithful and no error or fault was found in him. By the way, this is just reality, isn't it? You rise to a level of prominence in your position and what happens? People want to tear you down. People become envious of you. This is what we see here, which by the way, you know why people become envious? Because you are what they can never be. And when you understand that you are placing yourself in the line of fire but you're exactly where you need to be. Your job now is to remain faithful.

Notice the accolades that was said about Daniel. That he was faithful. He was faultless. That there was no error found in him and notice the quandary that caused these men. Verse 5. Then these men said we shall not find any ground for complaint against him because this Daniel, unless we find it in connection with the law of God. How would you like that to be said about you? We can't any complaint about him except he's faithful to God. That's what we want said about us. One commentary writer by the name of Robert Jamison it is the highest testimony to a Godly man's walk when his most watchful enemies can find no ground of censure, save in that he walks according to the law of God. That's what you and I want to be. That's what you and I want said of us. The same thing that is said of Daniel here.

But now the plot begins to thicken in verse 6. Then these presidents and satraps came by agreement. That idea is they came thronging. They came in a group. They came in a stormy haste. One translation puts it. They came altogether to the king and said to him, "Oh King Darius live forever. All the presidents of the kingdom, all the prefects, all the satraps, all the counselors and the governors we're all agreed, which is a lie by the way because Daniel would have been within this group and he would not have agreed to what they're about ready to propose. He says, we've all come into agreement that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction that whoever makes petition to any God or man for thirty days, except to you oh king shall be cast in the lion's den. Do you hear what they're saying? They're saying, king we want to make you god for a month. There's nobody who's going to be allowed to pray or worship any other god or

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any other man but you. And we want you to sign this injunction into law. Now, right away you get a sense that these are dubious people. They are setting up a plot. This has nothing to do with King Darius. This has something to do with beyond that. Which, by the way this is how skilled people of deception work. And this is why people of integrity are often deceived because they don't think this way. This is not about Darius. This is really about Daniel. And so, they apply themselves to really the concept let's raise Darius up and maybe in his own ego he'll go along with the entrapment.

And, sure enough we read, now, oh king, verse 8, establish an injunction and sign the documents so they cannot be changed according to the law of the meads and the Persians which cannot be revoked. Therefore, King Darius signed the document and the injunction. See, there was something interesting that was said in that text. According to the law of the meads and Persians, antiquity teaches us that the Persian law stated that once you put something in an injunction as a law it could not be revoked. They did that so they could keep from frivolous laws being made. This, they're going to use to their advantage.

Now, what will Daniel do? That's the question. You see whenever you read Old Testament stories you have to realize that there are ebbs and flows and there's high points in them. You look for those high points. You look for those points of tension. That's where we're at now. Think about the movements in the story that we're already aware of. Here we have a movement of a mass power change. Darius comes to power. He sets up his presidents and his satraps. Daniel assumes a high authority. People do not like him and so they try to set this trap for him. They get the trap going and now we're waiting. Is he going to fall into it? What is he going to do? And so there's real tension at this point in the text and that's where we come to verse 10. What will Daniel do? So, when Daniel knew what the document had been signed, verse 10, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber; opened to Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day; prayed and gave thanks before his God as he had done previously. What about this verse do you find most interesting? For me it's the beginning. Even though Daniel knew the document had been signed. Even though he knew the actions would jeopardize his life he didn't stop. You say, yes, but you know he's breaking the laws of the land that day. Isn't that wrong? No, this is what's called civil disobedience. And that is we are called by God to listen and obey the laws of man until they intercept the laws of God. And then, when the laws of man break the laws of God we are to follow the laws of God and that's called civil disobedience. That's what Daniel was doing. Now, he wasn't throwing it into the government's face. He wasn't throwing this in front of the kings face. He was quietly going about what he was required to do by God. You see, remember there's a plot that's going on. People are waiting to catch him; to entrap him. And the entrapment happens in verse 11.

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Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making a petition and a plea before his God. Say, how did this happen? You know, when I would read this in the past I couldn't understand it. Were they sneaking around in the bushes? Were they peeking in the windows? What were they doing here? I didn't understand it until I traveled to the Middle East. And I remember thinking about this passage when I was standing in Bethlehem. Bethlehem's on a hill. I was actually at this one point and I was looking over into this ravine and there were literally hundreds of houses very close together. And on top of many of these houses were this type of gazebo type of structures and sometimes they would have over the top of them some kind of linen fabric to block the sun or some lattice work. And I asked our guide about those and he said really those are from ancient times. The Christians would use them today. The Jews would go in. They would face towards Jerusalem and pray. The Muslims used these. They face towards Mecca and pray. It's just part of their culture. I immediately understood what was going on. This is what was happening with Daniel. He went up into a special room that was open and it didn't take much for people to either look down in or look up and they could see his actions. And this is what's happening here. They knew he was doing this. It was just a matter of time. They knew he was a man of honor and that he would do it again. And so, verse 12 we see a heightened sense. Then they came near and said before the king concerning the injunctions, like a bunch of little kids running to the kid. You know, they have some juicy bit of information. Say, ok, did you not sign an injunction that anyone who makes petition to any God or man within thirty days except you oh king shall be cast into the den of lions? Of course they knew that. They're the ones who put the whole thing together but just look at them. And the king answered and said the thing stands fast according to the law of the meads and the Persians which cannot be revoked. Then they answered before the king, Daniel, who was one of the exiles from Judah. Always throwing that in their faces. Now, it's like a point of being prejudice. You know, that guy is from Judah. He's not really one of us. That Daniel. Pays no attention to you oh king or the injunction you have signed but makes his petition three times a day.

You know what's interesting about this? Is at this point you're wondering what's going on in the king's mind. Is he going to be angry? Is he going to set about some kind of retribution. No, you know what? I think at this moment the king must have realized he'd been swindled. He'd been conned. There's something about when trusted people con you that bites considerably deep and we sense that in verse 14. Then the king, when he'd heard these words was much distressed. By the way, that's a Hebrew concept of inner turmoil. Inside he much distress and he set his mind to deliver Daniel and he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. In other words he exhausted every legal concept possible to get him out but there was nothing he could do.

Now, by the way, just as an aside, do you know what I find interesting about this whole story? Is that never once do we see Daniel rise to his own defense. He's quiet. Does he remind you of somebody else in scripture? In Acts, chapter 8, verse 32 it says like a

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sheep he was lead to the slaughter and like a lamb before it's shears is silent so he opens not his mouth. Acts 8 speaks of Jesus Christ. He did not defend himself either. He did not feel like there was any reason he should defend himself and let the truth defend him. You know Daniel's a precursor to Christ? He says nothing in his own defense.

Verse 15. Then these men came by the agreement to the king and said to the king well, know oh king it is the law of the meads and Persians that no one injunction or ordinance that the king established can be changed. The king knew that. And then the king commanded that Daniel was brought and cast into the den of the lions. Then the king declared to Daniel may your God whom you serve continually deliver you. Remember that, we're going to come back to it. And stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of the Lord that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel.

Now just, by the way let me give you a little history of lion's dens because they've unearthed many of them. Archeologists have studied the use of lions of a form of both torture and execution and there are a number of lion's dens that they've unearthed. They're usually multiple rooms. One major room that the victim can be brought into and a stone rolled toward it and then there are minor rooms where the lions are kept and fed and then these doors are opened and usually you can look down and you can see what's going on. This is probably what was happening here. Daniel, an elderly man is brought in and the stone is rolled in front and then the lions are led out. What I really enjoy reading is the liberal commentators who do not necessarily take the Word of God as the Word of God. They'll come up with all kinds of these farfetched ideas. Well Daniel hid out in the corner and the lions couldn't find him or the lions were old or they didn't have teeth and this thing was just risen to a new level of a story and that's how it's risen. No. These lions were starved so that they were prepared for their victims and we're going to see a little bit later how useful these lions were.

But then the story comes up to the end of verse 17. Daniel's in the lion's den and we turn to 18 and it says then, the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting. No diversion was brought to him and sleep fled from him. We get to this point of great tension in the text and we're saying what happened to Daniel? And the story switches over to the king and you're like, I don't care about the king. What's going on inside the lion's den? Well, there's an important transition that's taking place here. Another movement in the text is happening. There are principle players here. The king is one of them. You say, why did the story go to the king? Well, we're going to see that in a moment but don't forget what I said to bring forth to remember. And that is what we saw in the end of verse 16. When the king shouted may your God whom you serve continually deliver you. What's that tell you about Daniel and the king? That obviously Daniel had made an impact, a relationship with this king. Told him about the true God,

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Yahweh. You see here's just another example of a life that is powerful. A righteous life that is powerful when used by God. There are so many different aspects of this story that we could look at. We could look at Daniel's personal integrity. We could learn from his faith. We could learn from how he handles persecution to his prayer life to the way that he interacts with people in evangelism. There's so many aspects. See, that's why as we move towards the end of this story you need to be thinking how can I make personal application out of this story.

The story shifts to the king. The king has a restless night. He can't sleep. No diversion. No music. No books are brought. Nothing can settle his soul. The next morning he wakes up, verse 19 to the break of day. The king rose and went in haste. In other words he ran to the den of lions. And as he came near to the den where Daniel was he cried out in a tone of anguish the king declared to Daniel, oh Daniel, servant of the living God has your God whom you've served continually been able to deliver you from the lions? There's a pause. Then Daniel said to the king, oh king live forever. My God has sent his angel and shut the lion's mouth and they've not harmed me because I was found blameless before Him and also before you oh king I have done no harm whatsoever. Now there is this sense that he is able to personally vindicate himself. Now he opens his mouth and he says I have done no harm. God has seen that. You have seen that and God gives the glory back to God, my God has saved me, sent an angel. You say how did one angel get involved here?

2nd Kings, chapter 19. One angel was responsible for the slaughter of one-hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians. So you think one angel is powerful enough to take a care of a few lions. And that's what's going on here. God sent an angel to spare Daniel's life. Why? Ultimately to give the glory back to God. And the story continues verse 23. And the king was exceedingly glad and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So, Daniel was taken up out of the den and no kind of harm was found on him because he had trusted in his God. And then the king commanded and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of the lions. They, their children and their wives. Which, by the way is a glimpse into Pagan justice. We don't fully understand it but it seems like the one who did the crime, the whole family paid. So the whole family was thrown in and watch this. Before they reached the bottom of the den the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces. You tell me these were just old lions just laying around, toothless. No. This was a brood of lions that were fierce. They tore this entire group of people and their families to pieces. God was praised on this day because of a righteous life.

And the story ends in verse 25. Then King Darius wrote to all the people, nations and language that dwell in all the earth peace be multiplied to you, I make a decree that on all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel.

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You know what I do when I come to the end of this story? I feel a sense of personal conviction. If I can be transparent for a moment, when I came to the end of the study I felt personally convicted about my own level of righteousness. And I'm not saying I'm a righteous man. I'm saying that when I read the story I feel like I have a long way to go to be like Daniel. But you know that's kind of what righteous people do. They inspire us. Daniel inspires us to move to the next level of righteousness. You see, and this is the point of the story where we are called to make application. And really, I would sell the story short, I would sell the spirit of God short if I gave you three or four or five points of personal application. You know what this story calls us to do. It calls us to look into our own life and say what would do? How would we act? What we would do if the government told us we weren't allowed to pray anymore? Would we just say, alright. I'll just go along with it or what would we do if we were in the midst of persecution? Would we raise up and try to defend ourselves or let the truth speak for itself? What would do if we had opportunity to stand before the most powerful people in the world? Would we keep our faith silent or would we be clear about who our true God is? You see there's so many different elements of this passage, of this very familiar story that calls us to be introspective and make application so this is my call to you. That you don't let this story just slip away or over lunch you let it drain from your mind and then you forget about it. No. Hold on to it. Spend time asking the Lord, what can I learn from this man Daniel? What levels in my own life do I feel convicted that I need to work on in my own sense of pursuit of righteousness? What is it about this man who lived several thousand years ago that can still change our lives today. See, when you do that then you're allowing the Word of God to make penetration in your life. You're truly becoming a student. You take what you've learned from the Word and you say now may it transform my life. You know, that's something that has to happen between you and the spirit of God. Think differently about this story. Use it as a method to self examination and see if it won't motivate you to think about your own personal righteousness. Because, what did we learn? We learned the power of a righteous life. We've seen the sovereign hand of God move throughout one life and what do we see? We see if that if we position ourselves the power of a righteous life that we too can be used by Him. Let's pray to that end. Let's pray together.