## Only one King to serve

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Date: 25 February 2018 Preacher: Nigel Styles

[0:00] The book of Daniel, chapter 6, on page 898, beginning at verse 1. It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps to be throughout the whole kingdom, and over them three presidents, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give 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.

Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find a 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.

Then these men said, We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God. Then these presidents and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, O King Darius, live forever.

All the presidents of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counsellors and the governors, are agreed 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, O King, shall be cast into the den of lions.

[1:43] Now, O King, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it cannot be changed according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.

Therefore, King Darius signed the document and injunction. When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber, open towards Jerusalem.

He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God.

Then they came near and said before the king concerning the injunction, O King, did you not sign an injunction that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O King, shall be cast into the den of lions?

The king answered and said, The thing stands fast according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked. Then they answered and said before the king, Daniel, who was one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O King, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.

[3:09] Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel, and he labored till the sun went down to rescue him.

Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, Know, O King, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunctional ordinance that the king established can be changed.

Then the king commanded and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, May your God whom you serve continually deliver you.

And a 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 his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel.

Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting. No diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish.

The king declared to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you serve continually been able to deliver you from the lions?

Then Daniel said to the king, O king, live forever. My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him, and also before you, O king.

I have done no harm. Then 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 the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the lions' den, they, their children, and their wives.

[5:24] And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces. Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell on all the earth, Peace be multiplied to you.

I make a decree that in all my royal dominion, people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For he is the living God enduring forever.

His kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be no end. He delivers and rescues. He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth.

He who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Well, good morning, everybody. Please keep that bit of the Bible open, Daniel chapter 6. Can I say thank you very much to Simon to stepping in last week and preaching from Daniel chapter 7 for us.

Listening to the recording, he got the biggest laugh when he said, I'm not Nigel Stiles. I don't know what's funny about that, but you also think that's the kind of thing that amuses you, anyway. And you'll find on the service sheet on the back page an outline of where we're going, and if you find it helpful to follow those headings, then you're welcome to do

Or alternatively, you could just fill in the blank square by putting in drawings of lions or whatever. Let's pray, shall we? We thank you very much, Heavenly Father, that you have granted to us, your people, your precious and very great promises.

Thank you for all that you have told us you will do. Please would you help us to have great confidence in you, because we are sure you will do what you say.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Runt. Oh, is you there, runt? Oh, he's coming to eat you. You runty little scrum-screwer, piffling little fish-figler, prunty little pug-svizzler, or I'm going to winkle you out, you tasteful human being.

Of course, you'll recognise those words, which are from? Good. I guess you can't have been a child yourself, or have had children or grandchildren in the last 20 years and not know the story of the BFG.

[8:07] It's the stuff of nightmares, isn't it? And for a child, of course, it plays on all their fears, the whole idea that there are monsters walking around and that these monsters are responsible for those weird things that go into your mind when you're asleep at night.

You can be frightened, of course, of all kinds of things, can't you? I mean, there are all kinds of phobias. Pogonophobia, for example, is fear of facial hair.

Bathmophobia, fear of stairs. Bogiephobia, fear of... No, not bogies.

Bogiemen. And whether it's the dark or a room full of rats, of spiders, or being at some great height, I guess all of us has things that unsettle us.

The irrational fear that then comes to you in dreams. You can't grab a hand, or you can't run away, or there's this monster chasing you. And as Christians, we may know that God is in charge, but when our fears loom large, sometimes, often, it doesn't feel as if God is in charge.

[9:27] Sometimes when we're really frightened, it can feel as if monsters are in charge in the world. Now, I'm not talking about the BFG literally walking around Dulwich.

I mean, not real monsters. That would be frankly ridiculous. Dulwich. But we watch the news, and we see another suicide bomb and the mayhem that results.

Or an election that gives power where we fear its use. Or war, the rumours of war, migrants on the run trying to escape the horror of their Syrian home being bombed.

Change of government, potential new prime minister, a new Mr. President. And we know that despite all the promises and the hopes, even powerful governments are impotent when it comes to those sort of powerful monsters.

Ronald Reagan said when he was president, governments don't solve problems, they merely rearrange them. And we know, don't we, that four or five years' time, will you have stopped the monstrosities?

[10:36] We know the news will be just the same, don't we? It will still feel as if monsters are in charge. Or closer to home, somebody we love very much dies and everything feels bad.

Or there's some terribly hard thing in our family, something that goes terribly wrong. Or there's an illness, or depression, or childlessness, or old age, or you lose your job, or you fall out with your best friend.

Something invades your home, your life, to disrupt your carefully made plans. And it feels at that moment, doesn't it, as if you have no control. It does feel as if somehow monsters are in control.

Forces that are beyond us. That I think is exactly how it felt to Daniel. Do you remember if you were here last week, that dream in chapter 7?

Just look at the beginning of chapter 7, where, do you remember it began with Daniel seeing monsters, very obviously, in charge.

[11:47] Coming out from the sea and looking like, well frankly, like everybody's worst nightmare. He sees something in chapter 7, verse 4, that's like a lion with the wings of an eagle and two feet like a man.

Or in verse 5, a bear with ribs between its teeth. Or in verse 6, something that's like a leopard with four wings like a bird and four heads.

So, not very like a leopard. Or verse 7, what is the monster in verse 7 like? It's like nothing. This is a real monster. It's just an iron teeth machine.

And this is reckoned to be a sequence of kings of kingdoms, the Babylonian, then the Persian, then the Roman, then the Greek and the Roman.

And all the time during this parade of preening, powerful monsters, Israel's God alongside them looks pathetic, defeated, as all-powerful as jelly.

[12:47] See, Daniel is one of the Old Testament people of God growing up in the land that God had promised to his people. But the people in that land weren't living under God's rule and the once united nation has divided into two.

It's weakened. The northern half gets carried off by marauding enemies. They effectively fizzle out and disappear from history. The southern half of the nation, which is where Daniel is, he's a teenager, and this southern half is threatened by the next world superpower, the next monster coming out of the sea, if you like, Babylon.

It's come and invaded the land and carried off the best people, including Daniel, this undergraduate student who's now enrolled into the Babylonian indoctrination program.

How could anybody, like a Daniel, possibly claim that God is in charge when it is so patently obvious he lives in a world where monsters are in charge?

And Daniel is written, the book is written, for that kind of crisis moment. It's crisis literature. It's 999 literature, if you like. Now that setting, I think, is exactly what we've got in our story in chapter six, isn't it?

[14:12] I mean, you could read our story in chapter six as a retelling of what Daniel sees in chapter seven because Daniel six is, it's as if you've woken up from the nightmare and discovered that it wasn't a dream.

Oh my goodness, it's reality. There really is a lion that is about to eat me. And it turns out then that in Daniel six, this is the real world.

It's not just the stuff of dreams and nightmares. The real world that Daniel actually lives in is a world where there are monstrous powers strutting their stuff over the surface of the planet.

And for the matter, that is the world that we live in where we're subject to powerful forces, to monstrous might that threatens us. So let's come then to this story in Daniel chapter six.

And I've got two things that this chapter tells us. So if you're the kind of person who likes to make notes in blank spaces, here's the first one. The first thing the chapter tells us is the horn made war with the saints, which is a very strange worded heading.

[15:30] But it comes from chapter seven, verse 21. Come and look at chapter seven, verse 21. Whereas part of the dream, the vision that Daniel sees, he sees a horn making war with the saints and prevailing over them.

The horn is a Bible way of describing great strength, military might. The strength behind the superpower empires of the world. Donald Trump is a horn, if you like.

And the saints are God's people, Christians. the horn made war with the saints. And Daniel is told that in this world God's people can expect to find that the strong horn will be stamping all over God's people, all over the saints.

They'll march into Daniel's homeland, they'll, without so much as a buy your leave, they'll tread underfoot the people of God. Now, of course, that is not how chapter six begins, is it?

Let's trace the story through. Chapter six begins, first of all, with Daniel distinguished. For sure, he's in exile, but he's worked his way up the civil service, greasy pole, for the enemy.

[16:46] He's done well for himself. He's now one of the top three men. He's overseeing 120 local area mayors. And then he becomes the best of the three presidents.

And then in verse three, high office indeed waits for him. It is intended that he will be set over the whole lot. Daniel distinguished.

So, of course, the local boys, the 120 sand traps, the native Babylonians, they favor positive discrimination. They don't like our jobs being handed over to foreigners. they're steamed up with jealousy and they invent a cunning plan to bring Daniel down and to promote the provincials.

Second scene, Darius, the king, deceived. So, Daniel distinguished. Darius, the king, deceived. The satraps' plan is simple. Appeal to the ego of King Darius.

Suggest that nobody can anymore make prayers to their God. Verse 7, everybody now has to make all their prayers to him, the king. What it's doing, of course, is putting the cult of the state at the heart of everything and the king, head of the state, at the heart of that.

[18:10] So, the state is powerful, the state expects, the state demands, and you put the king right at the heart of it all. It's not subtle, but Darius falls for it.

Hmm, cunning plan, I like that, an excellent idea. And like every one of his other laws, this one gets written in stone, so you can't undo it. So, not only is Darius the king deceived, but also, third scene, Darius is deified.

the consistent pattern of the superpowers of the Bible. It's not innocent power play, but a deliberate policy to airbrush God out of it all.

From Adam to the Tower of Babel, from Pharaoh to Nebuchadnezzar, leaders conspire together, they cast off the restraint of God and say, we'll be sent to stage without him.

So, now, if you want to ask something of your God, you don't go to the priests in the shrine of your pet deity, you go to the king. And he will now mediate your request to the gods.

[19:21] He's being given the job of everybody's high priest. He, the king, is the one and only way you can access your God. Fourth scene, Daniel, defiant.

You like the D's? We're going to the D's in a big way. Regular as clockwork, Daniel is to be found praying. Same windows, wide open, three times every day as always.

It's in full view of everybody. It's almost deliberately provocative, isn't it, in verse 11? Now, I don't think this is really teaching us about our personal Bible and prayer time, our quiet times, that we should have them, that we should have them three times a day, and we should always have them in the window, though that application tempting, though that may be.

Nor, I think, is this teaching us about civil disobedience, or about being bold and brazen. we know from chapter 9 exactly what Daniel is praying and why he's praying.

This is all about his obedience. It's been set up ever since 2 Chronicles 6, that if the nation should end up in exile, this is how they should behave.

[20:33] They should be praying towards Jerusalem. So, Daniel defiantly obeys God and the inevitable happens.

And however regretful Darius may be, nothing can erase stone engraved law and order. What happens next is nothing like the children's storybook.

Can I just say that I don't think this is the story that ought to be the story we read to comfort our under fives and to snuggle them down for a nice quiet night asleep.

This isn't what you want your preschooler to go to sleep thinking about. There's no suggestion here is that these lions have a change of natural instinct.

There's no idea that they snuggle down like teddies and Daniel falls asleep using their flank as a pillow. Pillow. Even though if you go online you will discover how to make Daniel lion pillow craft.

[21:47] For all we know these lions have spent the entire night prowling around Daniel and they longed for food. And certainly when we get to verse 24 they are very lion like aren't they?

They haven't changed their character. In fact search online to see what it's like when a lion attacks a person.

Actually don't search online to see what it's like when a lion attacks a person. It's worse than you imagine. So don't read this story to your preschooler to give them a nice night of pleasant dreams.

So just to be clear then that this story is all about the horn making war with the saints. The powerful state opposing God's people and doing their best to bring them and their influence to an end.

The horn making war with the saints. 13 or 14 years ago I sat my family down to tell them that I thought it was likely that I would go to prison for being a Christian preacher simply for preaching the gospel.

[23:08] That was how I gauged the threat level in the UK at that point and I wanted to warn my family. I don't know if I was right then or if I'm right now. But if you haven't heard it listen to BBC Radio 4's Moral Maze from this past week.

Here is the way that one Christian lawyer described the program. The program reveals the nature of the challenge that we Christians face from an aggressive and increasingly intolerant secularism that has no understanding or respect for religion and has no commitment to the protection of our religious liberties.

In other words the horn making war with the saints. One contributor on the program said you can think what you like in private but don't let that affect what you do in public.

I don't think that's a saying that Daniel had as a fridge magnet. Of course his personal belief belonged in the marketplace and the aggressive secularists hated it.

The horn making war with the saints. Second thing. The saints of the most high shall receive the kingdom.

[24:30] the saints of the most high shall receive the kingdom. It's the other thing that Daniel saw in his dream in chapter seven.

So we've had four segments in the story so far. Daniel distinguished, Darius deceived, Darius deified, Daniel defiant, and you expect number five, Daniel dead.

And instead we get Daniel delivered. He's thrown to the lions, but against all the odds and all the YouTube videos of lions and people.

Daniel survives, verse 21. son. When the king comes and says, are you okay? The king, Daniel says, verse 21, O king, live forever. My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths.

They have not harmed me because I was found blameless before him and also before you, O king. I've done no harm. The king was exceedingly glad, commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den.

[25:37] So Daniel was taken up out of the den and no kind of harm was found on him because he trusted in his God. Now, what is the turning point in this story?

What is it that makes this unlikeliest of eventualities become true? So that Daniel, who is one of the saints of the most high, doesn't end up at the bottom of verse 24, overpowered by the lions before he reaches the bottom of the den with all his bones broken in pieces.

What's the turning point, do you think? I've got three possibilities, see what you think. So the first is that this story is really about Daniel's prayer. So to put it simply, Daniel did the right thing in praying when the state told him not to.

He obeyed God rather than man and God answered his prayer. Now we know from Daniel chapter 9 exactly what Daniel was praying in Daniel chapter 6.

He prayed in the light of the exile pleading with God to sort it out for a resolution. And in particular his prayer in chapter 9 is full of confession of sin, the personal sin that had led God's people into exile.

[ 26:55 ] His prayer is full of concern for God's honour, concern that people will think less of God because he's left his people in such a pickle. So he's longing for God's purpose, longing for a return from exile.

God's God's rescue of Daniel in the lion's den gives us in microcosm God's real rescue of Israel from the exile.

So that's the turning point, Daniel's prayer. Second possibility that this story is really all about the Lord's deliverance. And that seems to flow right through the story, doesn't it?

So once it's clear that Daniel is lion food, verse 14, if you follow the story through, the king spends the whole day trying to work out a plan to deliver, rescue Daniel.

Verse 16, the king recognises he can do nothing to deliver him and so he prays, may your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you. Verse 20, the next morning, when he rushes to see what has happened, his question is, has your God, verse 20, the God whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?

[ 28:21 ] And after Daniel shouts up the good news, the story ends, verse 26, with Darius's decree, people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, he's the living God enduring forever, his kingdom shall never be destroyed, his dominion shall be to the end.

Verse 27, he delivers and rescues, he works signs and wonders in heaven and earth, he saved Daniel from the power of the lions. In the big storyline of Daniel, the idea is that God rules, he's sovereign over all, all peoples and kings and nations and empires and this one who rules also is the one who rescues.

See here, chapter 6, he can, he does. And of course, if it is that this personal rescue of Daniel anticipates God's real rescue of Israel from exile, isn't this story wonderful news for the nation who are in exile, who are currently under the cosh of the horn to know that God can and does rescue?

Well, he did it for Daniel, he'd do it for us. Fantastic. So is that what the story is really about, God's deliverance? Or my final possibility that this story is really all about Daniel's trust, which is where verse 23 seems to take us, doesn't it?

Daniel was taken up out of the den, no kind of harm was found on him because, why? He had trusted in his God. And that's exactly where the New Testament, Hebrews 11 takes

[30:06] It's always good to see if the New Testament shines some light on any Old Testament story. And in Hebrews 11, which is that great long chapter listing people from the Old Testament, people of faith, when it tells us about what faith does, because people have got firm confidence in what they couldn't see, they were able to do extraordinary things in this world.

So we're told in Hebrews 11 that by faith, some even stopped the mouths of lions. Daniel. So what would you go for?

There are three possibilities. What's the turning point in this story? Is this story really highlighting Daniel's faithfulness in prayer? Is this story really highlighting God as the great deliverer?

is this story really highlighting Daniel's trust? What do you think? Talk to your neighbor. Ten seconds. Opt for one of them. What do you reckon?

Nine, eight, eight, eight, nine, nin

[ 32:33 ] Christians, us, would be given thrones alongside our enthroned Lord Jesus, sharing in his reign. And Simon made the point last week, didn't he, that this in chapter 7 is God giving his people a glimpse behind the curtain, if you like, a sneak look at heaven reality.

Because we all live here, don't we, in this world, in this bit of our world. All that we see and experience, it's very real, isn't it? It's a 24-7 bombardment on our senses of what is the real world we live in. But there's another reality that we cannot see. And just because it's not visible, it doesn't mean it's not real, it's very real. And we cannot know it unless God reveals it to us. And that's what he does in chapter 7 to Daniel. He says, yes, this is the real world that you live in, but you need to also know the reality that I'm showing to you. And through Daniel writing it down in this book, God has revealed that other reality to us as well. And he's done that so that we live not just on the basis of what we see, but also on the basis of what God shows to us.

So that we live in the world of the powerful anti-Christian state, the horn, if you like. Knowing that beyond the chains, there are crowns for Christians.

Hanging on the hooks in the throne room of eternity. A bit like a school cloakroom. There are hooks with names on.

Every Christian has got their own peg. And hanging on the peg with your name is your crown waiting for you. In other words, Daniel lived in Daniel chapter 6 in the light of Daniel chapter 7.

Daniel lived in the real world of Daniel chapter 6 in the light of what God revealed to him in Daniel chapter 7. Daniel could live not just by sight, but by faith with real confidence, holding firmly onto what God had revealed to him.

See, Daniel was sure that God delivers and rescues. Not necessarily from the lions. Let's not be simplistic about this story.

God didn't rescue Daniel from the lions. Daniel was still, verse 16, cast into the den of lions. But he went in the lions. But he went in there sure of chapter 7, that beyond these monsters with their great iron teeth, beyond death, potentially, there was the crown of life.

So he prayed confident in that purpose of God that he revealed. He knew that death would not thwart God's deliverance.

He trusted that God's final purpose was sure. You'll see that I've just combined all three of my possibilities. Sure of what God was revealing to him, that he is the deliverer.

[36:02] Maybe beyond death, but he is the one who delivers. Confident, trusting in that. Praying with confidence about that. Now, let's be clear.

This is not the Walt Disney view of the world. The Walt Disney view of the world is you can be anything you want so long as you have faith. You can be a king or queen if you believe.

That is what the song tells me at the end of the Prince Caspian movie. I could be a queen if I only had faith. There you go. As if believing is the thing. There are many misguided people who might travel to London Zoo and climb into the lion enclosure and say, I believe the lions won't eat me.

That's not what Daniel did. If you're somebody here who's not a Christian, you need to understand that that is not what we're talking about when we're talking about faith.

We're talking about stupidity. We're talking about living our lives in this real world in the light of the reality that God reveals to us. Daniel lived in the real world of Daniel 6, the world he could see and feel, but 100% sure of the real world of Daniel 7 that God had revealed to him.

[ 37:20 ] He went to his, if you like, very uncertain future. I mean, he can see the lion's jaws snapping. God could deliver me right now from them, he's thinking, but even if he doesn't, I know the future that he has planned.

And he went there because he was sure about the future he couldn't yet see. Now, of course, God has shown us far more because we've not just got the story of Daniel.

This story points us ahead to the story of the true and better Daniel, the truly innocent man that nobody could find anything wrong with, the one who was condemned to death through trickery and lies and put to death in the most gruesome way you could think of, who was then cast into the place of death that was secured with a huge stone that was sealed with the governor's personal seal.

And early on the next morning, a solitary mourner comes in tears and discovers not a corpse, but a mighty victor. He's not here, he's risen.

Now, that is how the Christian can live in this world. Not just by sight, not just on the basis of all we see around us, but by sure confidence, trusting in what God has said to us, revealed to us, shown to us, of the heavenly realities of the world to come.

[ 39:05 ] Amongst all the tributes to Billy Graham this week, here is a particularly stupid one from the Guardian newspaper. When Billy Graham stands before the judgment seat of God, he may finally realize how badly he failed his country and perhaps his God.

On the most important issues of his lifetime, he championed the wrong policies. Graham was on the wrong side of history. The world's most famous evangelist let his apocalyptic anticipation of the coming kingdom of God blind him to the realities of living in this world.

He was too locked into last day's fear-mongering to recognize the potential of the state to do good. How ironic.

In two millennia's time, in two thousand thousand years' time, when we are gazing back on the short lives we lived here, when we evaluate our life here and the time when the horn was making war with the saints, and we compare that with the kingdom that we then possess forever, forever and ever, do you think we'll be thinking Billy Graham was on the wrong side of history?

If only Billy Graham had told us about the power of the state to deal with global warming, we'll be saying. You think? Do you think we'll pity Daniel then for facing these lions?

[40:42] Do you think we'll still fear the things we fear now? Do you think we'll be doing anything other than, well, as the chapter ends, trembling and fearing before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever.

He has a kingdom that shall never be destroyed and a diminution, no, no end. It shall be to the end. The one who delivers and rescues, who works signs and wonders in heaven and earth, who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.

Our Father God, we thank you so much that you have told us what we need to know to live in this world as your people.

Thank you that in this world, where it may well be our experience, that we see the horn making war with the saints, we thank you that you very clearly say to us, the saints of the Most High, will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.

And we pray that we may believe what you have told us and we pray that we may live in this world in the light of that reality. We ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus.

[42:10] Amen. Amen

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.