

In the Lion's Den

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 0 0] Well, how about I pray for us again before we get into God's Word. Gracious Father, we do thank you again for your Word to us. We thank you that it's by your Word that you save us, the Word of the Lord Jesus, and it's by your Word that you continue to grow us.

And so, Father, we pray that you would continue to do so this morning, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I've got an egg here. I've got to be careful because it's not hard-boiled.

Here it is. And I was wondering if I could get someone to catch it for me. Guy, are you ready? You got it? All right, go. Catch. It's not hard-boiled, but it's not real either.

Now, I'm doing this... Okay, all right. I can't see it's a glare. Now, my kids ganged up. They plotted to do that to Michelle and I just recently.

They got this egg from one of those stores at school, rotten school stores. And they came home, and then they got this egg, and they said, oh, we've got this egg. Oh, Mum and Dad, catch it. You know, our hearts nearly failed us.

[1 : 1 2] Now, you know, we thought we'd plot to get them back. We didn't get around to doing it. But there are some parents who did plot to prank their kids back after they got them. So the parents on the next slide bought this pack of donuts, Krispy Kreme donuts.

They put it down on the bench. The kids came running. Then they opened the lid. And then on the next slide, they found that the box was full of vegetables, which I thought was quite a nice little prank.

Pranks can go overboard, of course. Now, usually when you plot to prank someone, it's a bit of fun, provided they don't go overboard. But what happens when people plot to not prank but persecute people?

In our case, what are we to do when people plot to persecute Christians? It's happening, of course, around the world. I mean, you've just got the back of your pew sheet with a number of examples.

Let me give you some other ones. On the next slide, over the last few years, the American Atheist Society has been putting up billboards like this one. I'm not sure they've realised the irony about not believing in fairy tales, and yet it's still to dear Santa.

[2 : 2 0] Maybe they worked it out because last year's billboard that they put up tapped in on the next slide into Trump's campaign about making America great. And this one says, make America great again, skip church.

And they keep putting these billboards up to get people to stop going to church, stop believing in God. Just in June, two months ago, on the next slide, in Malaysia, the Islamic organisations rallied together to pressure the government into banning evangelical Christianity, because that's the Christian groups that are growing.

It hasn't worked, but here's another example of people plotting together to persecute Christianity. The next slide is one mentioned in the back of the bulletin, actually. China, just last month, the government said, you cannot be a member of the Communist Party and be a Christian.

Now, there are 88 million members of the Communist Party, and that's because if you're a member of the Communist Party, then you actually get jobs, you get preference in jobs and things like that. But now, if you are a Christian and a member, well, you're going to get punished.

And so you've got to leave the party and basically forfeit your job or job opportunities. Closer to home, there was a Christian event last September in the McHugh Hotel in Sydney, where Christians were coming together to talk about this whole same-sex marriage debate.

[3 : 38] But there were protests outside that started to grow violent, and the hotel cancelled the event. Or even last Friday, it was Purple Day, where some workplaces and even some schools encouraged people to wear purple to promote gay and lesbian, or more specifically, the LGBTI agenda.

And the government knew that there would be pressure on people. And so on the next slide, MP wrote to say that Purple Day dissenters must not feel ostracised.

But do you notice how the article from The Australian has actually called people who decide not to take part? We're called dissenters. You know what another word for dissenter is? A rebel.

And so even though politicians are saying, you know, don't pressure people who, you know, go for the traditional, the biblical view of life and marriage and so on, you've got media organisations which are still skewing the story.

In fact, I'm yet to see a box that has the no tick in it. You know, everywhere you look, you've seen people, all the politicians saying, get out and vote, and you've got pictures of ticks in the yes box. I'm yet to see a box that has the no in it.

[4 : 51] So here are different examples of people working together to lobby the government or society working together to lobby the government against the Christian worldview.

And in some cases, like Malaysia and China, people plotting together to actually persecute Christians. So how are we to respond to that? As we come to Daniel chapter 6 today, we'll see again some people lobbying the government or in this case, the king and plotting to persecute one of God's people, Daniel.

And as we work our way through the chapter, we'll see how Daniel responds. But first, the plot against Daniel. So point one in your outline, verse one in your Bibles. It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel.

Now, the satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss, you know, loss of taxes and so on. Now, Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his excellent qualities or exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

At this, the administrators and satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They found no corruption in him because he was trustworthy or faithful and neither corrupt nor negligent.

[6 : 18] And finally, these men said, look, we'll never find any basis for a charge against this man, Daniel, unless it has something to do with the law of his God. So here in verse one, we're in a new part of the story in history.

There's a new king ruling over Babylon. His name is Darius and he was the king of the Persians and Medes. Persians and Medes was two nations forming one empire.

Now, the history that we have from other sources, in fact, even in Daniel as well, tells us that the ruler was a man called Cyrus. And so it's likely that this king had two names, Darius and Cyrus.

That's not unusual. In fact, the last verse of our chapter today, if you just turn over the page for a brief moment, verse 28, you can actually translate it as the footnote suggests.

So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius. The word and in Hebrew can also be translated as that is the reign of Cyrus, the Persian. You've got a footnote there. And so it's likely that this man had two names.

[7 : 21] Either way, this king does what Nebuchadnezzar did. He appoints his own men as governors over his states or provinces, like the premiers are kind of over the states of Australia, if you like.

And Daniel is one of them. And yet Daniel is recognized as such a clever cookie that the king plans to promote him as second in charge of the whole country, like a deputy prime minister, if you like.

Now, verse three says that this was because of his exceptional qualities. But the phrase is literally because an excellent spirit was in him.

In other words, we are reminded that Daniel's abilities come from God. As we'll hear by the end of the chapter, God is working in Daniel so that the Israelites and, in fact, the whole kingdom may know that Daniel's God both rules and rescues his people.

But the other satraps are jealous, aren't they, of Daniel's planned promotion or pending promotion. So they want to take him down. But notice Daniel is so faithful in all he does, they can't find any excuse to charge him with.

[8 : 34] You notice verse four? They could find no corruption in him because he was trustworthy or faithful. And so they are forced to find fault with his faith in the law or word of his God.

Now, before we continue, I think there's a lesson here for us. We're to live good and godly lives so that people cannot have a go at us for doing the wrong thing.

In fact, we have to live such good and godly lives that the only way people can have a go at us is for our faith in God. And my first ever car was a blue Corolla and I bought it off a teacher, a school teacher, who taught with my father.

My father was a math teacher at a public high school. And as I was taking this teacher's car for a test drive, he was sitting in the passenger seat next to me. He made a comment. He just said, oh, yeah, your dad's a good man, except for that church stuff he's involved with.

Now, I didn't know what to say at the time. I wanted to buy the car. So I kept my mouth closed. But I thought afterwards, upon reflection, what a compliment to my dad.

[9 : 40] The worst thing that this man has to say about my father is that he was a faithful Christian who served his local church. And can I say, with this whole same-sex marriage vote coming up, tensions will grow.

And there may be conversations that you have with family members or neighbors and the like. If that happens, we need to make sure that our manner and speech are gentle and loving so that the worst people can say about us is we believe the Bible.

By the way, if you are a Christian, then it is right and loving to vote no, I should say. After all, loving people means seeking their good. And the Bible teaches us what is good. The government also wants us to know what we think, and hence the postal survey.

But when the conversation comes up, we need to be gentle and loving so the worst that people can say about us is that we believe the Bible. They might use different language, of course. You know, call it biggest or intolerant, which is actually what they're being at that point.

But you get the idea. Daniel is so faithful that they have to find fault with his faith in God's law, his word. And so they concoct this plan, this plot. See verse six.

[10 : 50] So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said, may King Darius live forever. The royal administrators, prefects and satraps, advisors and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any God or human being during the next 30 days, except to you, your majesty, shall be thrown into the lion's den.

Now, your majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed. And so King Darius put the decree in writing.

Now, verse six, that tells us that they all go as a group. And it lists all these different people to go as a group, which is somewhat remarkable. I mean, can you imagine all our politicians and premiers, you know, Labor, Liberal, Green, all coming together to go to Malcolm Turnbull to pass a vote or something?

You know, it's unthinkable. But that's what they do here. It's this unnatural alliance to get Daniel. And notice they also appeal to the king's vanity. You know, pray to anyone.

So not allowed to pray to anyone except you, your majesty. What king doesn't like being treated as a god? And so the king signs this new law without thinking, which cannot be reversed.

[12 : 07] And so here we have a law that is in direct conflict with God's law or God's word. For God's word says there is only one God we are to pray to. And so, again, the issue of who rules is raised.

Does King Darius and his Persian rule, sort of law rule, or does God and his law in the Bible rule? Well, Daniel knows.

And so he chooses to remain faithful. Point to in your outline, verse 10 in your Bibles. So in verse 10, Now it's worth pausing for a moment over these two verses because they teach us three things.

First, you might think that because Daniel goes home and prays with the windows open, that he's, you know, kind of sticking it to the sad traps. You know, he's kind of shoving it in their face. But he actually doesn't go out of his way to make a big deal of it.

Do you notice at the end of verse 10, it tells us that this is what he has always done. Now, what's more, in verse 11, the sad traps actually have to go and find Daniel praying.

[13 : 31] So it's not as though Daniel is deliberately flouting his prayer and asking for persecution. Rather, he's praying towards Jerusalem because that's where the temple was, the place that God promised to dwell.

And he's doing it just as he's always done. And so secondly, therefore, he remains faithful, doesn't he? He breaks the king's law in order to remain faithful to God's law.

You see, when the state-sponsored law compromises our faith in God, then we must obey God rather than man. And so Daniel prays towards Jerusalem to God, as he's always done.

But the third thing to notice is that he prays regularly, doesn't he? Do you notice that? Three times a day. Now, the Bible doesn't say that that's the magic number that we are to pray, but it does say that we are to pray regularly, often, in all circumstances.

For prayer is one of the ways in which we exercise our trust in God, is it not? When we pray, we trust God by handing things over to him, by depending on him and by asking him for help.

[14 : 36] It's an exercise of trust. In fact, Jesus himself often went off to pray to his father for help to be faithful. So no wonder Daniel was able to last 70 years in a foreign kingdom and still remain faithful to God.

He prayed regularly. Our Kingdom Growth Prayer Night is coming up not this Wednesday. I've got that wrong. It's the next Wednesday, the first Wednesday of the month. 7.30 to 8.15 for all those who can make it to pray.

I know, though, that prayer is easier for some than others. I'm by nature a doer. I like getting things done. And so it's very hard for me to stop and pray.

But, of course, prayer is doing something, isn't it? It's depending on God. And so I have to discipline myself to pause and pray for myself and for you, which I do.

For it's God alone who gives us help to remain faithful. That's what Daniel does. Verse 11, Daniel was praying and asking God for help, it says. Of course, the satraps now think they've got him.

[15 : 38] You know, ha ha. So verse 12, They went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree. Did you not publish a decree that during the next 30 days, anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, your majesty, will be thrown into the lion's den?

The king answered, The decree stands in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed. Then they said to the king, Well, Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, your majesty, or to the decree you put in writing.

He still prays three times a day. When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed. He was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

Now notice here in verse 12, how shrewd these satraps are. Notice that they know the king likes Daniel.

I mean, the king was about to promote him. And so the satraps first ask the king about his law, so he'll confirm it. And then they drop Daniel's name in it.

[16 : 47] You see, they very cleverly backed the king into the corner. In fact, as you read these verses, you can almost hear those reversing beeping noise as they maneuver the king into a corner, and he's got nowhere to go.

Having worked out he's been duped, the king spends the rest of the day until sundown trying to save Daniel, but he cannot. You see, for all his power as king, he has no power to save, does he?

He's even a slave to his own law and custom. And so at sundown, we read in verse 15, then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, remember your majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians, no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.

So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lion's den. The king said to Daniel, may your God whom you serve continually rescue you. A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed.

Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating, without entertainment, and he could not sleep. It's interesting at this stage of the story that Daniel is in a den, which is very much like a tomb.

[18 : 13] And do you notice verse 17, a stone is rolled over the mouth of this tomb? Does it remind you of anyone? But of course, Daniel doesn't stay there, like the person he reminds us of.

For God rescues him from the grave. Point three, verse 19. At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lion's den.

He said, when he came near to 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?

Daniel answered, may the king live forever. 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 anything wrong before you, your majesty.

In verse 20, the king asks, was your God able to rescue you? And the answer, a resounding yes. Daniel's God, our God, is able to rescue his people.

[19 : 19] But notice, just like in chapter three, with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and the fiery furnace, God does not rescue them from ever having to go through the persecution. Rather, he rescues them by being with them and bringing them through the persecution.

Daniel was still thrown into the lion's den, but God was with him by his angel. Just like God was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego by his angel in the fire. See, God is with his people in our trials and brings us through them to life again.

Being a Christian doesn't mean we'll have an easy life and never to suffer. I'm preaching to the converter on that one, aren't I? But by rescuing Daniel, God also turns the tables.

He shows that Daniel's faith in God was right while the Sadrap's are killed. See verse 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. And at the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lion's den along with their wives and children.

[20 : 33] And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. And notice in verse 23, we're told twice that Daniel was lifted out of the den, out of his would-be grave.

Again, it sounds familiar to someone who is literally lifted or raised from his grave. But the point here is that by rescuing Daniel, God shows that Daniel was right to trust in him.

And the Sadrap's were wrong. And in fact, an embarrassed and angry King Darius orders that they and their families even are killed.

You see, by rescuing Daniel, God turns the tables. But by rescuing Daniel, God also shows that God is a God who both rules and rescues.

You see verse 25? Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth, may you prosper greatly. I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom, people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

[21 : 40] For or because he is the living God and he endures forever. His kingdom will not be destroyed and his dominion will never end. He rescues and saves.

He performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions. Just like Nebuchadnezzar did in the earlier chapters, King Darius issues a decree to his whole kingdom and he declares that God both rules and rescues.

He says his kingdom and dominion never ends. In other words, God continues the rule. And he says three times that God rescues or saves. You see, because of God's rescue of Daniel, Darius now declares that God, our God, both rules and rescues his people.

And so the message of this chapter for the Jews in their foreign land is clear. In the face of plotting and persecution, remain faithful to God's word for God rules and rescues his people.

And it's a message that is the same for us today as we live in our foreign land of this world where people lobby the governments to change the laws, where people persecute God's people, whether it's in China or Malaysia or even here in Australia.

[23 : 04] Now, I realize this is a similar message to what we've seen before, especially in chapter three with the fiery furnace. But you see, it's hard to remain faithful in the face of persecution, is it not?

I mean, it's hard when groups cleverly lobby the government to change the law against Christianity, like in Daniel 6. It's hard when your work or school organizes a purple day like last Friday and pressures you to join in.

It's hard to stand firm and so God repeats this message. We're going to see similar messages throughout the book of Daniel and we need to hear them repeated because it's hard.

But the message is remain faithful for God both rules and rescues his people. And now, sometimes this rescue in this life, sometimes the rescue will be to life in this world, like Daniel here.

Or like on the next slide, this next slide is a man called Brendan Eich, I can't pronounce his last name, Eich, I think it is. He was one of the founders of Firefox. Now, if you don't know what Firefox is, that's the symbol on your computer where you double click that one and you explore the internet.

[24 : 14] So he's pretty big. He was a co-founder of this and a CEO. And he was forced to resign as CEO. Why? Well, because he supported traditional marriage in the US around the time that the law was being changed.

And so groups lobbied the board of his own company and forced him to resign. But he remained faithful and a couple of years later in June this year, he started a new company and as the headline says, made \$35 million in under 30 seconds.

Talk about being rescued through persecution to life again in this world. Now that's an extreme example. God doesn't promise to give us \$35 million to be clear. But you get the point, don't you?

Sometimes his rescue of us is to life in this world again. But other times though, it's not. It's a rescue to life in the world to come. You see, I alluded to the fact that Daniel points us to Jesus.

There are a number of similarities. The enemies of both Daniel and Jesus could find no corruption in either of them. Both the enemies of Daniel and Jesus conspired together, you know, the Pharisees and Sadducees, against them.

[25 : 27] Both enemies lobbied a king or a governor, Pilate, to have them killed. Both ended up in a den or a tomb with a stone rolled over it. And both were lifted out of the den or tomb.

The big difference, of course, is that Jesus actually did die. But God rescued him through death to life in the world to come. You see, sometimes God rescues us to life in this world like Daniel, but other times it's life into the world to come like Jesus.

We saw this in our second reading with the Apostle Paul as well. So the next slide, the verses from our second reading. Notice what he says, the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength when he was being persecuted.

In fact, he's in prison as he writes this. So that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth.

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely, where? To his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever.

[26 : 34] Amen. Now keep that verse up on the screen and have a look at it for a moment because again there's three things that are similar to Daniel chapter 6. At first, like the angel in the den, God was with Paul, stood by his side.

You see, God is with us through our trials and persecution. Second, God rescued Paul from the lion's mouth to life in this world. But third, notice verse 18, sometimes Paul knows that that rescue might be to life in the world to come, his heavenly kingdom.

But either way, Paul is going to remain faithful so that the message of the gospel might be proclaimed and notice at the end, God might be glorified. Just like in Daniel, where Daniel's rescue ended in King Darius glorifying God.

You see, whether it's rescue to life again in this world or rescue to life in the world to come, we're going to remain faithful for God does rule and rescue his people. And we are to remain faithful with God's help so that people might see us as different, might hear the gospel and glorify God.

We'll finish with a couple of stories. I met a man this week who left his country a little while ago. I won't say which country because this sermon's being recorded. But the country passed a law not too long ago where if you converted from Islam to Christianity, it was illegal and you would be punished severely.

[28 : 03] And so he left and came to Australia. And in the last few years, he just shared his life story and how he came to Jesus. And now he actually has a church of 200 people down in Dandenong.

Just because he's a natural evangelist, he's just sharing this story. Now, it got wind of what he was doing down in Dandenong back in his home country. And the secret police found his brother, smashed his legs, broke his legs and told his brother to send him a message here in Australia, here in Melbourne and said, this was what's going to happen to all your family if you keep preaching about Jesus.

And his brother said, keep going, remain faithful. Or someone from our church on a different, on a less severe scale. Our last Friday, as I said, was Purple Day, which used to be used to raise support for epilepsy, actually, but now it's changed.

And so in lots of workplaces and schools, people were encouraged to wear purple. And someone from our church decided, look, I love all people, but I don't support that. And so he decided, you know, he didn't know how his work colleagues would react, but he wasn't going to wear purple.

He wasn't going to go to the morning tea. Instead, he just quietly sat in his office and remained faithful. He was like Daniel. He didn't show off about it. He didn't make a fuss. He still sought to be loving, but he remained faithful.

[29 : 24] That's all easier said than done, I realize. And so when it's hard, pray for God's help, like Daniel did. And remember the examples of Daniel and Paul, and of course, the Lord Jesus, that we might remain faithful to our God who both rules and rescues.

Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you again for this timely reminder, given the world that we live in, to remain faithful to you and to your word, for you are a God who both rules and rescues his people.

And so, Father, we pray that you would help us. Please be with us by your spirit to help us stay faithful, remembering the examples of Daniel and Paul and the Lord Jesus himself.

And we ask that your name might be glorified. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.