

# Fasting Lions

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[ 0 : 0 0 ]     thanks Melanie let's pray Heavenly Father would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening in Christ's name amen hello everybody it's so nice to see you all here today if you're brand new my name is Aaron and I look after the service so if you are new and you feel like saying hi to me afterwards I would love to meet you come and say hi all right if you could have your Bibles open if you didn't open for the reading page 737 we're going to stick closely to the text here we're looking at Daniel this is our final sermon I think in Daniel before we move back to Matthew so the passage right the story it's really familiar to us and its familiarity to us can be a problem it might mean that we come to it with a fairly one-dimensional view a simplistic view of the story it's a bit like David and Goliath I think we've heard it so many times David and Goliath and we can we can read David and Goliath and think well it's about being brave

Goliath is this metaphor for all our problems and we should be brave like Daniel like David and we'll be okay it's this you know it's a fantastic underdog story be an overcomer be brave like David so that's a fine message but it's not the point of David and Goliath and the Goliath story taken into context who are we supposed to identify with in the story of David and Goliath I mean it's not Goliath it's not David it's not David either in that story we're the soldiers we're the soldiers on the sideline who have no hope in the face of an enormous enemy we're people without hope we are people who need someone to fight on our behalf for us because we can't win that fight that's the point of David and Goliath it's the story of the gospel it's the same with the lion's den story it can suffer like the Goliath story from a sort of one-dimensional interpretation Daniel is great be like Daniel now however

I actually think he is held up as somewhat of a model for us but I think that's only part of the story I think the main thrust of the story when you follow the narrative the main thrust of the story the climax of the story surrounds this question will Daniel be saved?

will God save Daniel? that's the central question of the story so let's get into it bit of context first so as predicted earlier in the story of Daniel remember the if you're around there was the statue made of lots of different materials and gold and clay and iron and stone and stuff and it you know it all broke apart and it was this sort of word that King Nebuchadnezzar's empire would fall and sure enough it does in the space of three verses the world is being run now by the Persians and Darius is in charge he obviously really likes Daniel he's promoted to one of the three most powerful men in the empire and how is Daniel going to go with this?

will he compromise? remember the whole book the book as a whole is targeted towards God's people who are in exile how's Daniel going to do?

[ 3 : 5 8 ]     like other Israelites who were tempted to give up their faith Jerusalem has fallen obviously the temple which they had so much hope in there's rubble they're under the thumb of a new ruler how are they going to live?

are they going to forget God's promise to renew all things or are they just going to get on with their lives make the most of it live for themselves and assimilate into the Persian culture?

it's a very tempting thing to do it's certainly make life easier and that's our question too how do we live in our culture? how do we live in a culture committed to pluralism and to many gods and many moralities and here is where Daniel is really helpful to us in our context today see one of the great things about Daniel as an example to us as a side theme in Daniel is this is his wonderful faithfulness and he was faithful to the end see at this point in the story if you read it and you follow the dates Daniel's probably like 80 years old at this point it's remarkable so at the start of the story you're thinking is he going to fail late?

like David like so many of these other sort of Old Testament giants no he doesn't verse 4 it says that he was a faithful man it's a great reminder to us that we never get past the need to be watchful we never get to the point in our Christian journey where we can just sort of relax and cruise we must be always watchful for sin creeping into our life we must be always watchful for selfishness creeping into our heart we must be always watchful for little idols our hearts are idol making machines we must be watchful for these things even late even if it had a good start Daniel was faithful and it seems one of the keys to his faithfulness one of the keys was his prayer life and we get some really interesting details about Daniel's prayer life in verse 10 if you can sort of slide your eyes over that little part but first do you remember what led up to him praying?

what led up to Daniel praying? well Daniel's doing very well you remember however due to some professional jealousy and probably some racism some folks wanted to take Daniel down he was the foreigner he's described by his conspirators as the exile right he's a foreigner doing better than the locals that's the kind of thing that makes some people angry made Daniel a target and it's a story played out all over the world isn't it?

[ 6 : 33 ] people who are thinking about their life and thinking it should be better than this who do I blame? I'll blame the immigrant and there's no shortage of people in North America with that attitude at the moment but that's an aside so let's move on I'm an immigrant why aren't people trying to take me down?

I think I'm not successful enough I take that personally by the way that you're not trying to take me down so these guys looked at Daniel and what do they do? the first thing they try and do is they try and find him committing a crime like they try and find him doing something really stupid and they can't and the first thing they do is they look for some corruption in him because they assume he's just like them they assume that he is corrupt but Daniel's not he's just brilliant isn't he?

he's living out this Jeremiah 29 principle and I'm not talking about Jeremiah 29 11 which is I know the plans I have for you the plans to prosper and give you hope etc etc etc it's all it's the lesson though in Jeremiah 29 stuff in Jeremiah God is talking to these people he's sent into exile and they have a couple of great temptations these people one temptation is to sort of cut themselves off completely from society the other temptation is to assimilate totally into that culture and God says no through Jeremiah he says no God says be engaged in the city but keep your identity that's a great word isn't it?

be engaged in the city but keep your identity let me read from Jeremiah 29 the lesson known Jeremiah 29 this is about sort of 4, 5 and 6 ish thus says the Lord of hosts the God of Israel to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon build houses this is what God's saying to his exiles build houses live in them plant gardens eat the produce take wives and sons and daughters and take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage and bear sons and daughters and multiply and do not decrease but seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile say it again seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf for in its welfare you will find your welfare that's just that's fantastic isn't it?

in the New Testament when Jesus talks about this stuff he describes he describes Christians as salt and salt was not a flavor it was a preservative you added salt to things that you thought would go rotten let's be salt this is what Daniel was doing he was doing the best job he could for that place he was seeking the welfare of the city and these other guys they hated him they were probably skimming off the taxes they were collecting a little bit for themselves in verse 2 it talks about that the king suffered no loss he hired these three guys so he would suffer no loss Daniel was doing his best so the king would not get ripped off so anyway these guys they can't find a crime Daniel's doing brilliantly and he's a good and he's an honest man and so they do something quite clever they invent a crime they make a new law they set Daniel up they say to the king king you are you are so great you just are really great let's no why don't you make a law that says only people can pray to you for one month and if people break the rule we throw them to the lions you can imagine that was a fairly intoxicating idea for a king somebody who's already at the top of their game who you wouldn't think he'd go much higher these guys come and say hey why don't we just make you a god for a month yes yes that's brilliant of course he loved the idea and then these conspirators they get they get this law signed

[ 10 : 41 ] Saul signed up and then they go to Daniel's house and they spy on him and what's he doing he's praying and it's a very ironic moment because they think they have found Daniel's weakness and in fact they found his greatest strength so that was all background brings us to the prayer verse 10 the prayer remember we're talking about what is one of Daniel's keys to his faithfulness how could he be in that city wanting the best for that city working hard for that city praying for that city but not be completely enculturated by that city not take on their gods and their moralities not take on their idols how could he do that and it was one of the reasons was prayer and we have these very interesting details about the prayer I don't know if you noticed those the first thing is it says this well it says the first thing Daniel did after the law was signed was he prayed isn't that remarkable Daniel prayed assigned the law

Daniel prays but here's the thing about this it makes it very clear to us that this wasn't a sudden burst of energy this wasn't like a burst of spiritual adrenaline he wasn't thinking oh my goodness I've got to start this is terrible I've got to get into my prayer mode here no this was a habit it says verse 10 it said he'd done this previously it says he did it three times a day he prayed so when the crisis hit it didn't create a prayer life that's what it's trying to tell us when the crisis hit it didn't create a prayer life it revealed a disciplined life it revealed a prayer life a couple of other things about Daniel's prayer it says he got down on his knees to pray we do this here at St. John's don't we and I don't know if you've ever wondered why we do this it's one of my favourite parts of the whole service actually now you don't have to kneel when you pray Daniel did it we do it as part of our service because it's this physical thing to remind us of a great spiritual truth because we're embodied people we're physical we're physical people it's a physical thing to remind us of a great spiritual truth kneeling reminds us of our true position before God and our true position before

God is we are as well as being his sons and daughters and other way in the Bible it talks as God's friend we are also the servants of God Christianity is not a democracy it's a monarchy and yes it's a throne of grace we kneel before a throne of grace which is wonderful that is true but the kneeling reminds us that it is still a throne that we come before one more thing about Daniel's prayer he prayed with his window open towards Jerusalem I find that a very interesting detail remember like if Daniel could look out his window with a giant telescope and he could look really really far out towards the east and let's say he could see Jerusalem what would he see he'd see rubble he'd see a destroyed city so why did why did

Daniel sort of face the east wherever east is why did Daniel face east well first you don't have to face east Daniel faces east here Daniel was facing this destroyed city to remind himself of God's great promise to renew all things even though things look really bad he was going to trust what God had said even though it looked like the gods of Babylon and Persia had sort of won Daniel trusts in God's promises promises to renew all things I think that's brilliant I find this as I've been studying this very encouraging when I think about a city like Vancouver which is so spiritually foggy and I think oh goodness here we are this little remnant of weird Christians doing church well now God has said he will renew all things he's going to renew the whole world even a place like Vancouver

Miroslav Volk is a theologian he's Croatian he's at Yale down in the states he says that humans are teleological creatures telos it means purpose he says we're made for purpose we're theological creatures and that purpose is tied to the story we believe about the world see without a story we don't have a story for the world if we don't have a story for ourselves we're without meaning or it means we're forced to create a meaning for ourselves we're forced to create a purpose and that could be as simple as make the most of my life or leave my mark on the world or look after number one whatever it is but Daniel has a better story he has a better story and as Christians we have a better story then make the most of your life then look after number one then just do my best we have a better story and it's tied to

[ 16 : 16 ] God's story it is God's story it's God will keep his promises he will make all things new and he invites us into that that's why Daniel faced East I think to remind him of that let's keep moving those little details about the prayer there let's keep moving on we read the rest of the chapter you know what happens the conspirators go back to the king with news of Daniel Daniel's thrown to the lions he lives the conspirators die children wives they die it's terrible I know the Persians did that Darius then tells everyone that Daniel's God's amazing now if you dig a little bit deeper into the story and you look at the details again I know this uses this word a lot interesting but it is very interesting to me what is focused on in that second half of the story and what is not focused on in the second half of the story for example you would think you would hear about

Daniel's time with the lions right that's the interesting story it's with the lions what's he doing is he freaking out like how does that what happens but we don't what do we hear about we hear about the king's sleepless night we don't hear about Daniel's emotions we hear about the king's he's having this really tough time isn't it interesting we hear it's all about the anguish of the king not so much Daniel's problems Daniel's in the den he's in the den and we hear about the king's rough sleep why because it's trying to show us how weak the king is this king he's weak so the conspirators remember they come to the king and they remind him of the law and he goes oh yeah totally that's a great law I love that law it's fantastic it's the best law ever and then they spring the whole

Daniel thing on him Daniel broke the law verse 14 it says here then the king when he heard these words was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel and he labored until the sun went down to rescue him and no one could make him happy there was no respite he was really sad about this he couldn't save Daniel he couldn't protect Daniel from the lions den and it's all terrifically ironic isn't it the law the king signed made him feel like a god but it actually forces him to do something he doesn't want to do and his sort of attempt to grasp at absolute power ends up he's just a puppet so we go on and hear about his sleepless night and his fasting and all that now why do we need these details again we have to be very clear what the passage is trying to communicate to us that even the most powerful man in the world Darius couldn't save

Daniel he was trapped his hands were tied only only God could save Daniel only God could rescue Daniel and he did and the king wrote this wrote to everyone he knew telling them about this it's important to remember these miracles we hear about these are not just naked displays of power it's not like God can do a cool thing look at the cool thing he did with the animals no the miracles of the Bible are always signs they're always trying to tell us something and in this case the message is the God of Daniel saves and only the God of Daniel saves and it's wonderful how Darius describes it in verses 26 to 27 God of Daniel he is the living God enduring forever his kingdom shall never be destroyed and his dominion shall be to the end he delivers he rescues he works signs and wonders in heaven and earth he who saved

Daniel from the power of the lions it captures the story in the shape of Daniel's obedience there really is a God who is alive and doing stuff and he will outlast all of the empires and has he will outlast Vancouver he will outlast the enlightenment he will outlast the sort of neopluralistic society he will outlast the west and the east he will outlast it all he's the king above all kings and he's the king on top of that who saves people who saved us from an eternity without him this is the gospel right this is the gospel I don't know if you picked up on this and I'm almost finished here but it's not hard to see parallels with the story of Christ there's a group of conspirators who want a very important person dead there's a weak king who can't save

[ 21 : 32 ] Darius Pilate there's capital punishment there's a death sentence the lion's den the cross there's a stone did you catch that detail there's a stone rolled in front of the den or the tomb there's an angel in the tomb in the den there's a miracle now I don't quite know what to do with these parallels except it seems to shadow Christ's life and his death and his resurrection and it seems to point to Christ the ultimate Daniel who went into the ultimate lion's den for you this is what Christians believe so to finish up here look to finish up finish up Daniel's big message is not be brave like Daniel although I want you to be brave the big big big big point is not so much be faithful although be faithful when you're tempted to assimilate into the culture around you or to separate too much from it weirdly not just

I don't want to be involved remember the better story that we have there is a God who came to us who came to us in the lion's den will come again and renew all things it's a story of Daniel there is no hope outside of the God of Daniel consider where you're putting your hope Amen