

The Lion King

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[0 : 0 0] We turn back with me this morning to Daniel chapter 6 as we look at Daniel's story of Daniel and the Lion's den and as we try by God's grace and with God's spirit we hope today to apply that truth from God's word to our lives.

I want to start by asking a question because I think it's a question or it's an issue that faces a lot of people and faces me and probably faces you in your Christian lives. Wondering whether a lot of the time that our Christianity or our Christian faith is kind of, it's very dependent on our circumstances so that we find that if our circumstances are particularly bad we can be tempted to question God's care for us.

So we say, oh how can he possibly love me? How can he possibly care? When things are going so bad, when things are so difficult in my life and we can use our circumstances, maybe when things are going great we don't really think about it at all and we just kind of, we've got God as a Christ as a benign saviour there that we can pat on the head but it's not particularly relevant to us as long as things are going well.

But things are going badly, we find it easy for us to challenge him and question him and wonder, well you know you say you care and you say you love me but it doesn't seem to be the case and that's understandably human isn't it?

Because if you love someone, if someone loves you and they say they love you and they've got the power to change your circumstances, you would think it very strange if they didn't make your circumstances better wouldn't you?

[1 : 3 8] If someone had that ability and that love for you and things were going badly and they could change it and they didn't, you would think well that's a strange kind of relationship and I think that's where the problems come from because we apply human kind of standards to our relationship with God and there are parallels but we always need to recognise that God does love us and God does care but God sometimes has a different agenda for us because he loves us and because he cares and because there's things that as we go through suffering and difficulties and need will draw us closer to him and we'll deal with some of the issues that need to be dealt with sometimes in our lives.

We need always to look at God through the lens of his word, that's why it's so important because it's telling us about him, it's telling us the kind of God that he is, he's telling us the kind of things that we might go through but that ultimately he's holding us, he's holding us strongly, he loves us and he cares for us as Christians and I'm going to look at that a bit today. It's a bit like very relevantly, it's a bit like looking at the eclipse isn't it? We've got to look at the eclipse with our special solar eclipse sunglasses otherwise it will hurt our eyes and we'll damage them and I went out there on Friday morning I saw lots of people just looking up at the sun without any solar glasses on but they're not blinded but I think it was probably because of the clouds but you know if we're going to not be damaged by that we've got to use the right equipment and the same truth spiritually in a sense, we look at everything in our lives through the lens of scripture or through the lens of our relationship with Jesus Christ and particularly the prism of the cross of Jesus, that's crucial. Otherwise our lives will always be a huge roller coaster of experiences, things are good, maybe we feel close when things aren't so good, we're questioning God and it becomes very circumstantial, our faith becomes really circumstantial and our relationship with Christ equally so. So can we look at the example here of Daniel in this story, there's a lot in this story I'm going to skim over it but for Daniel at this point and if you're visiting with us then I'm sorry you'll have to do a little bit of catch up with us at this point. Things were looking good for Daniel here in chapter six of the book that tells his story in verse three. Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators, sat traps, that he was king, the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. So we've seen in Daniel's circumstances a roller coaster of experiences haven't we, we've seen that he is done well at the beginning, well he's exiled into Babylon that's not so good, then he does really well and he becomes an important political civil servant and then he's ignored by the next administration and then Belschazzar puts him into the third highest place in the kingdom and so things at this point are looking good, he's been in the backwaters but now he's third in the kingdom and there's this new empire with Darius in control and Darius wants to take some of the previous political leaders and keep them in place because that will keep stability going and that will be important and in this new empire Daniel is blessed, maybe Daniel thinks great, finally I'm blessed and maybe inwardly that's how we always feel isn't it that we feel that's our right to be blessed, to be in a great place in our lives and so he enjoyed, he kind of basked in the rays of the pleasure of the king for a while and he was important, not that he looked for importance but he was significant and he had an important role to play in the kingdom, things were looking good even though there had been a change of circumstances for him, however that didn't last long, the blessing that he enjoyed, the good times didn't really last very long and very soon he's the victim of workplace jealousy, I don't know whether it's the same satraps and administrators and people who are over the kingdom now but very soon it becomes clear that they don't like Daniel, they don't like him, he's an ex-Ali, he's one of the people of Judah, he's of an inferior race and he's in this important position and so they really very quickly work a plan together to get rid of him and they know it can't be on the basis of his abilities as a leader, it needs to be on the basis of

his faith. So the interesting thing there is that we have new circumstances for Daniel and how many of you today are looking for new circumstances to make things better? I'm really longing for, if only it was just different, if only I had this job, if only I was in this but if only that person and we were always kind of looking one step for different circumstances that will make things better for us and that's what Daniel got, he got different circumstances, things were completely different and yes quickly he realises and realises that new circumstances weren't the answer for him because he's plunged into different battles and that will often be the case for us I think that new circumstances might be great for a little while but we will be plunged into battles sooner or later.

So what's the temptation for Daniel? Well what might be the temptation for Daniel? And we don't know but I'm considering what may have been temptations for Daniel. Daniel may have said at this point when he realises that they're going to bring out an edict, it's going to affect him because he's a praying man and the end is going to be the lines then.

What is he tempted by? God give me a break, give me a break God. I've been faithful all the time, Daniel's an old man by now, he'd been a young man right when he's 17 years of age, he's now an old man and maybe he's thinking God give me a break, I've been a faithful servant for so long, I've never turned my back, I've had enough already, give me a break here, things are terrible and the temptation possibly for him as it is sometimes for us when we see our circumstances being particularly bad or going to be particularly bad we say oh look I'm fed up, you obviously don't care. What kind of love is it that you have that you allow this to happen? I wonder if that's sometimes how we're tempted to think when our circumstances aren't quite so good or possibly maybe he was tempted to argue the toss, maybe he was tempted to say right I'm going to fight fire with fire here, I'm sick and tired of these sat traps and administrators and politicians and civil servants telling lies about me, I'm going to sue them, I'm going to hire a defence lawyer and I'm going to make sure that I get a good counter motion going and nail them instead of me getting nailed all the time. Revenge, fighting fire with fire, working on the same principles that they were working on, is that sometimes a temptation when things are bad for us as well? Let's ditch the turn the other cheek stuff, let's ditch that because that's kind of passive and Christian but it's not practical in the workplace and in the kind of environment that I'm in do we say I'm not going to remain faithful to God here,

[9 : 30] I'm just going to take it into my own hands. Very often I think when our circumstances militate against us we want to take action ourselves, we want to provide a solution ourselves that gently lays aside our Christian principles and allows us to fight fire with fire to take people on at their own game or possibly he was tempted to just go with a flow. One month, that's all, I'll just not pray for a month, no one will notice probably, I'll just keep a low profile and an important place here, I want to stay here, I'll just keep a low profile, no one will know I'll go with the flow. I didn't mean that to rhyme but do our circumstances govern our responses because here are difficult circumstances and it could have been that Daniel responded in any of these ways in a way to counteract these circumstances and deal with them in a way that might have seemed more practical. Well the reality in the story is twofold and the first thing is that he didn't say very much, okay, that's really great about the story and it's actually about Daniel and it's a great lesson for ministers is that he didn't say very much. There's a parallel in this chapter, this chapter really parallels chapter three, it's very similar, it's a different empire but it's the same opposition, it's the same jealousies, it's the same circumstances that were rubbish for him and there's a lot of parallels between the two and in both situations in chapter three it wasn't Daniel, it was Shadrach, Mishin and Abednego, in that circumstance then and in this chapter here neither of them say very much, there's few words, it's not all about bluster and words and Daniel defending himself but his life and the life of his friends in chapter three are marked by complete integrity. They were as, first Timothy speaks about those who should be leaders in the church, they were above reproach, there was nothing that their enemies could find about them, they had exceptional qualities were told and they were completely incorruptible in their business and Daniel in his business, they could find no corruption in him, he was trustworthy, he was neither negligent nor corrupt, verse four tells us that. It's an incredible miracle of this position of power that he had that in this position he didn't speak terribly much, certainly not in response here but he is living with absolute integrity, that is a miracle in a power position where power we know corrupts absolute power, corrupts absolutely, he had no little boys in his bedroom, he wasn't cheating on his expenses, he didn't get cash for questions, he was someone who in his life recognized that the power he had was a gift from God, he was accountable to God, he was under God, he was humble before God and that is what gave him the incredible respect and position that he had hugely important and that in many ways that's the lesson for us in our lives that when whatever our outward circumstances are what God is looking for us as believers in Christ is to have that hugely significant consistent above reproach integrity and we can't do it, we can't do it on our own, it's what plunges us back in

our knees to the Lord Jesus Christ for his help and for his forgiveness and for his grace and I'm sure that was the case with Daniel, it's not so important that our words are many today, I don't think so, I think people are cynical about words, they're cynical about arguments, they're cynical about know-alls and sometimes as Christians we come across as know-alls, please don't get me wrong I'm not saying that words are unimportant or insignificant but our words which we look to be few and weighty must be backed up by the integrity of our lives, your workplace, your colleagues, my neighbours, our friends, our family know that what we are in private will be reflected by how we act and how we live in public so that we don't just have a kind of religiosity but we have a deep seated internal faith that drives and motivates our behaviour and our life, he didn't say much but his life spoke powerfully, he was without corruption, it's brilliant but when he did speak he spoke well, when he did speak he spoke well and what we see in this story is that

Daniel when he realises the desperate situation of his circumstances that he is about to be thrown into the lion's den is he speaks to God, that he speaks to God and that's so significant isn't it as we understand him and this is relayed to us in the story that he speaks to God, Daniel answered well in two ways, first we are told that he goes in verse 10 he learned the decree being published he went home to his upstairs room with the windows open towards you, three times a day he got down his knees and prayed giving thanks to God just as he had done before then the others heard him and he was praying and asking God for help, so when he spoke he spoke really well he speaks to God and what the great, I guess the great lesson or the great message of this passage is that Daniel whatever his circumstances was a man of prayer, relentless, dogged, determined prayer, three times a day he went towards, he went and prayed towards his God, recognising that they were out of the promised land he faced Jerusalem there was nothing magical about that it was just a command for them so that they wouldn't forget where they'd come from this is such a great tutorial for us he prayed three times a day, now I don't, what's my biggest problem?

My biggest problem is I say I'm too busy to pray today, I've got too much on I'll just do a quick prayer like a quick piece of toast as I walk out there I'll do a quick prayer as I'm walking down the road, too busy, well here was Daniel who was way up there in the land he was an important administrator and he had always had significantly powerful important things to do yet he had this unbreakable habit of praying to his God three times a day he made no excuses that's what he did this is the foundation that allowed him to overcome the bad circumstances that he finds himself in because he knows who his God is he loves his God and there's this relationship with him that is hugely significant, it's unbreakable behaviour of Daniel and isn't it great that he starts his prayer you know what would I do in that situation?

Be a blubbering wreck, I go oh you can't let me go in here, you can't let me go in this situation God please deal with it you say you care but what Daniel does is he thanks God as he has always done what possibly could there be to thank God for in the circumstances well it's because his perspective is different and it's the key to his faith in bleak circumstances he doesn't change his habit he doesn't change what he's always done he prays to God and gives thanks to God because he knows that God will deliver him in a bit like Daniel Shadrach Meshigna Ben-Gosy even if my God doesn't save me here I know that I can't do anything else because he will ultimately save me and take me to be with him he was able to be grateful because God was his redeemer God was his saviour God was the God whose kingdom was everlasting superb it's a superb focus for us that he prayed his words that he uttered were words to God and you know I don't suppose he needed to pray for very long we prayed three times a day he might have prayed for ages I don't know it doesn't say but I know in Ecclesiastes it says let your words be few because God is in heaven and we're on the earth and it ends by saying just standing off God I don't think we need to have big long treatises every time we pray but we need that focus and that perspective of spending our time speaking well speaking to God in a relationship with him as believers and he also spoke about

[19:03] God you know it's very interesting we're kind of let is I don't have time to go into and I don't have the intelligence but there's a lot of really interesting things in this chapter and even the way it's brought together dramatically the way it's written you know we're left not it's written as a drama we're not told when you know Daniel's thrown into the lion's den we're not told that there's an angel there we're not told what's going to happen we're just left he's thrown into lion's den and the focus is actually on Darius interesting Darius pacing around and he can't get any sleep and he doesn't get entertainment and he runs to the tomb in the morning to find it to the den sorry in the morning to find out what's there and then Daniel responds and says okay live forever my God sent his angel and shut the mouth of the lion's they have not hurt me so he's found innocent in his sight so he speaks to God and then he speaks about God and he explains he explains God's dealings with him and he brings glory to God and he says that you know my God he says my God sent his angel it's not just any random God of the universe my God it's just personal gracious relationship he has with God it's very understated isn't dramatic is it if you read these words and in the Hebrew I think that's that's how it's meant to be it's understated it's supernatural but it's not sensational it's not the language of the sun or the daily record it's it's very downplayed but it's a powerful true testimony that in the den he was there and experienced the presence of God through this angelic person who may well be pre incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ but we're not told but nonetheless the presence and the power of God was revealed through that company that he had in the lion's den miracle of God strength against the line now for us that can we you either think well but that's just fabled nonsense or whatever you might or whatever people might think but it was hugely significant for Darry's Darry's knew all about lions lions were the great symbol of the power of his kingdom and for God to or Daniel to confess that God had shut the mouths of the lion's was a really powerful testimony to a greater kingdom and a greater power than his own this was in line with his understanding of a God of rescue he belonged to a people who'd been rescued all through their history they'd been rescued and it was pointing forward to the redeemer who would come and rescue not Daniel but you and me as Christians there's great picture this great pattern of God's word revealing and pointing forward towards Jesus Christ and so Daniel says I was in the den I was thrown into the den but I was kept by the presence of God and God was with me and God sustains me and

God rescues me from the power of death and of the grave now there's a really significant and important lesson for us as Christians in the 21st century now we're spoiled Westerners here and we don't really know much trouble and much difficulty and much struggle in relation to others but we are people when circumstances are bad need to stand on the foundation that God is a God who will save us in trouble but not necessarily from trouble he wants us to be faithful no matter what the cost no matter what it takes us he doesn't want us to compromise he doesn't want us to give up he wants us to stand firm and go into the lion's den if that is what's required because he says I'll be with you there I'll take you through it I will rescue you now it there will be in our lives times of temporary relief like it was for Daniel temporary relief but our circumstances this life will always be a battle so if we're looking for relief and release from God don't look for it in circumstances other than temporarily because he promises this life will be a battle but we need to recognize that in this battle he is with us and he wants us to focus on a greater hope which is the resurrection which is the hope of Easter which we're coming up to and we're going to take a break from Daniel next three weeks to look at the Easter theme that is the hope of our lives it's why it's why you and I in our bad circumstances can begin our prayers with thanksgiving just as Daniel did but we much more so than Daniel because we look back to what Jesus has done we look back to what his commitment is to us and to the suffering that he has gone through and promises to end for us in the great new heavens and the new earth this story does it not remind you of another story with a stone that was rolled over a big hole and it was sealed and someone ran to that in the morning to find out what was there you can't you can't but not see that parallel that there's a parallel between this seal and this earthly kingdom and this power and the power of pilot and the power of Rome which sealed the tomb that Jesus was putting after his crucifixion to point us to a greater resurrection a greater hope that Daniel could only look forward to and probably didn't truly in any meaningful way know how it would work itself out so in all our battles and struggles as if you're a Christian today you can bow the knee you can get on your knees and you can bow your head before God and get on your knees and pray with gratitude you have a million reasons for thanking God today as a Christian whatever your circumstances now I'm pleased don't please don't think I'm belittling your circumstances if they're particularly bleak today I'm not in any way at all these were bleak circumstances that Daniel found himself in he was facing death and he was facing opposition and hatred and everything that went with that but his foundation was absolutely based on this relationship we had with God through prayer and that was what took him through that kept him from being a circumstantial Christian and I guess the other question is if you're not a Christian then you are going to be banged about and blown about by circumstances because that's all that you have where is your foundation not just in the kind of day to day circumstances but in the aging and in the illness and in the death that we inevitably face which God says of course is a spiritual problem that separates us from him in whom is your trust

who will we go to who are you praying to in your life so when you ask the question where is God in the bad times do consider Daniel and his life and his character and particularly his prayer that we need to be men and women of dogged relentless prayer and we need to be people who put our trust in him now just before we finish can I just say a very brief word about the kind of responses sometimes that we have to our faith well I'm sure there are hundreds of responses that we get from other people towards our faith but there's two here just that I want to mention for a minute as we close if we stand up for Christ if we are Christians who are full of integrity and if we are full of integrity we will find every day there will be opportunities for us to share our faith in the workplace business life business world student life and home life whatever it is if we are if we are completely with integrity depending on God we will find opportunities because it's we're going against the flow that's what will happen what are the responses that well there's two particular very briefly one is outright opposition and that's what Daniel faced from the other government satraps and administrators they couldn't stand him they couldn't stand him now he's a good guy he was a nice guy Daniel was a humble bloke the king loved him never again neither loved him Darius loved him he was a good it wasn't like he was an offensive officious annoying person he was a decent bloke and he did his job but he did his job really well maybe that's why they didn't like him but primarily they didn't like him because of who he was and the faith that he had the outright opposition it was irrational they were threatened by him and they were threatening to him really ugly and I think we find that that can be the case today and we oughtn't to be surprised by it I certainly don't think we should look for it but you might find that there's either there's a kind of we know it politically there's this political kind of societal hatred towards Christianity in our secular society but sometimes it's personal too and we know that Christ faced that that there's a really irrational threatened and threatening opposition to you sometimes a Christian that is nothing to do with your character or your person and that might really hurt because none of us like that nobody likes opposition nobody likes being hated and it's Christians none of us like that but I think it's very important to recognise that that will sometimes be the case but that we are to act like Daniel in response and not to not to take up boxing gloves against it but to act like Daniel to continue to be consistent to be prayerful and to be humble before God because what makes it clear is it ends badly for them and we don't glory in that whatsoever but it ends badly for them it's like Haman's gallows you know that Haman ends up being hanged on himself they're hoist on their own pitard as they are the ones that end up getting thrown into the lion's den and dealt with very brutally their family are also thrown in with them in the land of the Meads and the Persians that was a cruel and oppressive law but it ends badly for them but then there's the confused respect of Darius which is very different as well and we often find that don't we we mustn't think that everyone is against us because we're Christians and have a kind of persecution complex that usually makes us a bit defensive and ugly but here's Darius you know Darius is really like pilot and there's a parallel there between Darius and pilot he respected Daniel he actually liked Daniel he was really disappointed by this law that

he'd stupidly given because of the flattery of the other administrators he didn't really thought of any integrity in many ways he was troubled and he was he was pleased when Daniel was survived and he gives kind of lip service at least to Daniel's god but we don't know if his end either because he was so mixed up and confused and seemed to be just driven by popularity and driven by by just not trying not to offend anyone which was never really works confused respect so you have two these two different responses can I just say that you'll find both of these responses in your life and I find that in mind can we just pray for them both pray for people in that camp whichever camp they're in and act the same be consistent to whatever group there is because like us they also need grace like us we're lost until we come to Christ and they need Christ and we need to show them Christ we don't need to win the argument we need to show them Christ we need to point them to

Christ by our lives and that will often be most powerfully witnessed in our response to our own suffering and our own circumstances and the way we respond to their opposition of us and their lack of loyalty sometimes in our lives the great link between prayer and a consistent relationship with God and a consistency of life and an ability to come through dark times struggling with dark times your prayer life founded in him so that you know him and like we said that in my passing thoughts at the very beginning you grasp not just know about but grasp how deep his love is and what it means you know you know I could take in a tin of honey here I could say this is honey I know this honey is really sweet you know there's lots of surveys being done about how sweet this honey is and there's a chart up on the wall it tells you the level of sweetness in this honey it's amazing statistics everything's been done shows you you know that honey sweet don't you know what I like to do I like to just take the tin and give it to you and stick your finger in it and take a big scoop and then put it in your mouth and then you taste and you know and you experience the beauty of that honey and that's what grasping the love of Christ is but we know all about it and books till we can read books till we come home about the love of Christ and we know about it in our test we know about it in our confession but we need to we want like

[33 : 13] Paul to pray that we'll all grasp it stick our fingers in the honey pot of his love and taste and see that God is good may that be our experience.

Let's bow our heads briefly and pray Father God we thank you for your word and we thank you for your truth we thank you that it tells us about Daniel from us a long time ago but yet really no different our circumstances may change but our needs our need for rescue is no different ultimately and our battle with circumstances will often be the battleground for our faith so we pray that you'd help us to become stronger as we rely on you and that each of us would determine to build that relationship of faith with you as our saviour that we would pray to you regularly and get to know you better and that that might be the foundation of our lives and if there are those here today who don't know you who know about you but don't know you as Lord and Savior never entrusted their hearts and lives to you may they do so taste and see that God is good through the prism of the cross and the glorious resurrection of Jesus who defeated death and the power of the grave as he defeated the power of the lion and allowed Daniel freedom and rescue may we see these parallels may they not be fantastical to us but may they be true and real and by your spirit may they apply to us blesses as we sing together in response to your word may we sing from our hearts may we sing joyfully may we sing loudly and may we give all in song and we rejoice that you give us song which to respond to you we ask these things in Jesus name amen.