

Daniel and a Lion

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[0 : 0 0] Now, I'm very conscious today, in fact, I'm conscious most weeks, but I'm very conscious today that when we come to the sermon, indeed when we come to worship, not just the sermon but the praise, the prayers, the reading of Scripture, when we gather together, you need to take, we need to take something away. We do need to take something, and we recognise that and we recognise the need for the Holy Spirit and all to help that. You need to go away with some kind of clear vision of what it means to be a Christian and why it's worth carrying on being a Christian. You need to hear God's voice through His Word and through the preaching and through the songs and all that we do together. It needs to be, I sense, I feel, it needs to be vivid and not vague for you. And that's important that we come each week and we come to be refreshed and renewed and given a clearer understanding again of our faith in Christ and why it's significant. And so we're always praying that God will speak to us through the worship and through the Word as it's preached. And one of the things we've been really trying hard to do with these stories is to understand the principles behind them and work out why God has recorded these stories and why they're recorded for us and what we need to, we recognise that they're out of our comfort zone, they're out of our cultural understanding, they're out of our time, but yet they remain what God wants us to know and wants us to understand about Himself as part of His own ongoing revealed picture. And part of what we've seen is that we recognise the importance of God intervening in our lives as He did in the lives last week we saw Shadrach Meshach and Gideon and this week with Daniel. And that, in a sense, is one of the principles when we come together to worship, we're looking for God to intervene through His Word and through His person into our lives. So this must never be, and it ought never to be a lecture sermon, should never be lectures.

They're not lectures, they're something much more significant in a sense than lectures. And the Bible says it's through the foolishness of preaching that God chooses to work and reveal Himself, not obviously just the half hour monologue from the pulpit, and because it's not a monologue, because you're all drawing out of me and God is working through it, but also as we just declare truth from His Word in any other context.

But what I want to do this morning is just pose two questions from this story. Even as I'm reading it again, I realise there's lots and lots and lots that I'm going to be missing out and that's sad, but we only have half an hour and so I'm going to look at two questions particularly from this story from Daniel. And the first question is how do we live in the city of Edinburgh as Christians? Okay, we're from Edinburgh, we live in Edinburgh, we're Christians in Edinburgh. How do we live as Christians in the city of Edinburgh? And the second question is how can we face the unwanted in our lives? So when the unwanted things happen in our lives, how can we face them as Christians? How does God want us to face them as Christians? And I think we can learn at least some answers to both of these questions from the chapter that we read on Daniel. So how can we live in the city of Edinburgh as Christians? This is an important city. We love the city. It's important to us and it's important to the nation. And the congregation is full of people who live and work in the city. We have all kinds of different people. We have lawyers and bankers and teachers and nurses and doctors and people in other jobs and people studying, people in school, people in communities, citizens of Edinburgh and its environs. And we can learn from Daniel in the way Daniel lived in a very significant and important city of Babylon, how we can follow his example as we live. And of course it doesn't just apply to city life, but there is a great significance I think for us as people, as Christians who are living in the city. There's two words from the chapter that I think summarise and highlight the kind of attitude that Daniel had of living in the city. And the first is in verse 3 where it says that Daniel became distinguished above all the other high official centre because it was an excellence but it was in him. So the first word is excellence. Daniel had an attitude of excellence to living in the city and working in the city. He was living in captivity if you remember that. His people, God's people had been taken out of the promised land because of falling into idolatry and were captive in Babylon which was a godless or at least they didn't worship the living God, they were a city and a people and a power who worshiped idols. And yet in Babylon he understood and he knew what God wanted him to do when he lived in the city and what he wanted the people of God to do when they lived in the city of Babylon. In Jeremiah chapter 7 verses 4 to 7 we have these words, hopefully no we don't, okay right I'll just look them up. Jeremiah chapter 29. Now this is a very important look at what we do. This was a prophecy that was given before the people went into exile to Babylon and God through Jeremiah says to them, thus says the Lord of hosts that God of Israel to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, build houses and live in them, plant gardens, eat their produce, take wives and have sons and daughters, take wives for your sons, give your daughters and marriage that they may bear sons and daughters, multiply there, do not decrease. But 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. So there was a longing from God that the people of Babylon would prosper as Daniel and his compatriots also sought to prosper in the city. So they were encouraged to immerse themselves into the life and into the culture of the city of Babylon, to reach as high as they could in the city, to seek the good of that city and to work for the kings and the leaders of that city, for the secular leaders and the idolatrous leaders of that city. And that was Daniel's job and he was excellent at it.

He worked for King Darius and his task was to make sure that King Darius suffered no loss. And that's primarily an economic term. So he was a kind of economist and he made sure that the returns for Darius were good and he was excellent at that job and he served the king. He didn't simply work there to survive. He didn't simply work to get enough money to go on holidays. He served the king. He wanted the king to suffer no loss and he was excellent in all he did. He was above reproach. Verse 4 tells us that Daniel couldn't find any complaint or fault. He was faithful. No error or fault was found in him. He really worked well in this environment and he did his absolute best. He was real promotional quality and excellence was what he pursued in his work. So that's the first word that helps to describe Daniel and how he lived in the city. The second word maybe isn't quite so popular in verse 13.

When the sat traps come and accuse Daniel of praying they say, Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah pays no attention to you. So excellence is the first word. The second word I would use to describe how a principle of living in the city is exile. In other words Daniel although he pursued excellence and he served the king and he got involved in the culture absolutely fully and completely in many levels was an outsider. He didn't belong. He was an exile. He was foreign. His colleagues never really accepted him and they were jealous of him. He couldn't be bought. His ethics and his morality was outstandingly honest and clear and that invoked antagonism within them not only because of who he was in his culture and in his race and his ethnicity but also because of his morality and his ethics.

[8 : 36] He was consistently different morally and ethically. Yes he was excellent but he was also an exile. He knew his God. They knew he knew his God. They knew that he prayed regularly three times a day. We're told that in verse 10 that he did what he was his habit. He went and prayed three times towards Jerusalem and nothing changed that. They knew that. They knew that nothing would change his habit, his honesty and his dedication to the living God and he was someone who while pursuing excellence also knew he was in exile. He understood what it was to be an exile in the city and he knew that from God's word.

Corey read from 1st King that Solomon's prayer and the dedication of the temple and he would have known and understood that in this prayer Solomon prayed when we're taken into captivity may it be that my people face towards Jerusalem and pray in repentance and pray for a return to that city and Daniel knew that and that's what he did every day.

That's why he went facing Jerusalem because that's where his that's what he knew as home. He had a bigger perspective and he prayed towards his God pleading that God would take them out of exile back to the promised land. That's where his home was. That's where his heart was and so we have the two elements of living in the city. One of excellence and one of exile. Now can I apply that then to your life and to mine as a principle? What can the principle be in terms of how we live as Christians in the city or indeed whatever we live as Christians? I wrestled about a phrase to use. I couldn't think of one for a long time but I thought a good one is just godly immersion. That's what he wanted. That's the principle of living as a Christian today in a secular world is one of godly immersion and that's a tension. So you live your life and I live my life with a constant tension.

A tension between being godly following God and being involved in the world, being immersed in the world in which we live. The kind of truth element and the love element that drives us out. We're one of them but in some ways we're not. We're like people but in other ways we're not. And we always need to be aware I think of extremes. We need to be aware of extremes in this area so that at one level we can become monastic and pursue an inverted commas godliness which separates us from everyone. That's not biblical godliness or we can be immersed at the other extreme just so completely like the world in which we live that we're not different from it. We're absolutely the same. No one knows that we're Christians because of our morality, our ethics, our silence and there's the two extremes that the principle brings us into the middle which is a godly immersion and there's tension there and it's a battle and a wrestle that we have to face every day. That we need to pursue excellence in the world in which we live. It's vital that you go to your work tomorrow or your studies pursuing excellence. That you're not dragging your feet. That you're not saying, ah well it's just a rubbish job and I've got a rubbish employer and I've got, I just want to complain and moan about everything. We're pursuing excellence. We do it wholeheartedly. We seek the good of our employers. We seek their good. We seek to do our best for them. We seek excellence.

We seek promotion. We love the city and its culture and its people and we pray for them. We pursue excellence in all that we do and we seek to get to the top if we've got the gifts and abilities to do so. There's nothing particularly godly or saintly about staying at the bottom of the ladder. Nor is there anything particularly saintly or godly or getting to the top of the ladder. But it's the pursuit of excellence in whoever and wherever we are that is a principle that we learn from Daniel. But alongside that principle of excellence is the principle of exile that we're to be godly in our immersion in the world. That this is not our home. This is not all that there is. This is not just what we're living for. You're called to be different. You belong to a different king. King Jesus. We serve another master. And so that perspective will inevitably set us odds in the world in which we live. We don't belong. 1 Peter 4, 3 and 4. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what the pagans choose to do, living in debauchery, lush drunkenness, orges, carousing and detestable ideology. They are surprised that you don't join with them in their reckless wild living and they heap abuse on you. So you'll have abuse heaped on you because you choose to live and follow Christ and live according to the principles that guide you in your relationship with Jesus Christ. So that is inevitable. Living in exile. If we're following Christ, we're going to pursue excellence, I hope, but also live in exile now with all the sympathy and love I can muster. Can I say in terms of that exile, suck it up. Just suck it up. Deal with it. Expect it. Don't blame God. Don't shake your fist at God when these things happen. Don't accuse him of being unloving. This is the world in which we live.

[14 : 23] We will pursue excellence and we have to recognize we're living in exile. Daniel sucked up. Daniel recognized that this is the world he lived in and that is the real deal with it. If it's good enough for Daniel, if it's good enough for Jesus Christ, it's going to be good enough for us as well and we should rejoice in that, but never go after it and seek it. How can we maintain that tension? How can we maintain the tension of godly immersion in the world?

I would suggest prayer. Prayer is the best answer to that. The following Daniel's example, maybe not literally three times a day, you may do much more than that, much less, but regular, relentless, daily, habitual, thoughtful prayer. He kneeled, he went on his knees and he kneeled towards Jerusalem. Now we don't all need to, and it's difficult in church to get on your knees, but I think there's a good principle behind kneeling because it says something about understanding who God is. It's very uncool today, I think, probably to kneel, but I would encourage you to kneel by your bedside or to kneel in your comfort, your praying chair, wherever that chair might be, kneel because it's a good mental, physical question of a mental understanding that we come before the throne of grace, but we remember it's still a throne. It still is thrown and when we pray on our knees we're saying, not my will be done, but yours. That's the essence of prayer, isn't it? Not my will be done, but yours. Daniel would have recognized what Solomon was saying in Kings, what we looked at and that he knew for himself and for his people they needed to repent and turn if they were to get back to the promised land and his life and his prayers would have been one of relentless repentance and pleading. I'm sure he pleaded about not going into the lion's den because we're told that he knew about the document and then he went to pray, so I'm sure he pleaded also that he wouldn't end up in the lion's den and he prayed his requests. Nothing could stop him. He might have thought, I'm not going to pray at this point, I'm simply not going to do it. They know what my usual is, I'll do something different.

I'll go downstairs into the basement and pray, then they wouldn't see me, but he didn't do that. He did what he always did. It was absolutely habitual that he did everything in his life with this dependence on prayer for myself and I'm sure sometimes for you it's often the opposite, isn't it? It's the first thing that goes. It's the first thing we stop doing.

It's the first thing we sacrifice. No time for prayer today. Too much to do to pray. Too many things happening to pray and it's the first thing that we jettison in our lives. Daniel recognized the absolute living, passionate importance of prayer in his life and also knowing the mind of God as he did, praying God's prayers, praying God's promises, praying, searching the scriptures, understanding what Jeremiah had said from God about living in the city, knowing what lay ahead. And so for us, the big question as we think about immersion and godliness and living in the city is, you know, where is our heart? And where is our home?

Where is our heart? What is our perspective? Because prayer will reflect that. Prayer will reflect our understanding of whether we're in exile or whether we're just immersed and will help us to keep the right perspective because we can't do it on our own. God promises to help us. That's the first question, taking longer, sorry, on that, the 9.10. The second question which I'll be briefer is how can we face the unwanted in our lives? So Daniel, you know, it's a famous story, you know, well, Daniel's 80 years of age by this stage and his life has been full of battles and of blessings. And here he is towards the end of his life and he's facing another huge battle at Den of Lyons. Is this it for him? Is this what it's going to be like as he faces this horrible unwanted end in his life? And so, you know, we recognize there's so many things that are unwanted. You may have come to church with a whole bag full of unwanted things that are happening in your life just now. Maybe that your life doesn't make sense. It may be illness, it may be weakness, suffering or difficulty of one kind. We know that God doesn't see you, you'll be listening or answering anything that we say. We feel victimized that there's a furnace or a pit ahead of us metaphorically speaking, opposed and discouraged, maybe by the behavior of others or even behavior of

[19 : 20] Christians. You may sense powerlessness as Daniel would have done over to change circumstances. How many of you feel that in our day to day living? Powerless over circumstances. You would love to change it. God's supposed to be all sovereign and all powerful. Why can't He change them for me? Or you may have had a very bad diagnosis this week and are facing certain death. These things happen. That is life for us. The unwanted comes into our life.

How as Christians do we deal with that? Can we learn from Daniel about how to deal with the unwanted things that we all face in our lives? It's a very simple answer, but I hope it's not a glib answer for us in verse 23. It's not Daniel who says it, it's the King who says it. He's taken up out of the den of the lions and don't eat him because he had trusted in his God. You knew that was the answer I was going to give, didn't you?

He trusted in God and you think, well, there's nothing new there. He's not going to say anything that's going to help me because that's what everyone says. I don't want to be glib and it isn't glib, but it's real and for Daniel it's absolutely real. He kept doing the same thing. He didn't change anything when he was faced with the unwanted. His life is a visible illustration of trust. There's a quiet inevitability about what he does. He just goes to his room and he prays. He knows about the heedict. He knows it's going to get him into a heap of big trouble and he's going to face the lions then, but he keeps doing what he's doing.

In a sense, I think in a sense he epitomizes the words from Psalm 46, be still and know that I am God. That's what he did and that's what trust was for him. He knew God. That was really the key. Whatever is happening in our lives when we are asked to trust is because we know the God in whom we trust. We keep searching his word. We keep praying to him relentlessly because we know who he is and we know that he loves us and we know what he's already done for us. I would say keep praying, especially when you don't feel it. Especially when you would rather not. It's like eating. Sometimes you don't feel like eating, but it's important to keep eating within reason. But we can pray as much as we want because we'll never get fat spiritually. Don't turn away is what I'm saying in terms of knowing God. Turn away. If you hear these words, turn away. It's the malevolent whisper of the enemy. That is what it always is. It's never right or good to remain silent before the living God because God's our rescuer and God's our helper and God loves us. And we trust therefore because we know him and we trusting means that we continue to know him even if he throws us into the pit. And if we're in the pit, whatever that pit might be, we can be there and know safety and peace. Now, you don't want to hear that, do you?

And I don't want to hear that. But that's what he says. He says, you may go through the trial, but as you trust in me, you can, like Daniel, know peace and safety even there.

[22 : 40] It's counterintuitive. It's impossible, but that's what he offers. Trust is waiting for answers as Daniel had to do as he was taken, not delivered from initially, but taken into that darkness. We wait for answers because we know the pit is temporary. We know he will always redeem eventually. Don't presume in trust to know better or blame God and simply disobey him. Daniel could have done any of these. These options were all open to him.

He chose not to. He didn't pray, at least we're not told what he prayed, but there's no indication that he prayed anything other than asking for God to help him. We are so often keen to give God the answers rather than simply make our requests. Know and trust that justice will be done. God is a God of justice and often our complaints come from a sense of injustice that we've been dealt with unjustly, that it's not fair, that we've done what's right, but God, you're not acting justly or other people aren't acting justly as it was in the case with those who conspired against Daniel. And we're told again and again in the story, they conspired, they got together, they conspired against him. The challenging truth here is that ultimately they were hoisted by their own pitard. They were blown up by their own bomb, because ultimately justice will be done by God. And where people, and where we fail to submit in recognition to God who says, it's only through Christ that

I can love God, and only through Christ I can love my neighbor. And I can never do it properly, but Jesus did it for me. Only then can we be assured of being secure and covered by his justice. And trust involves leaving other people to God as well. Daniel here, it's an interesting story because Daniel does his own thing with God. He doesn't argue with Darius, or we've got no indication that he looks at Darius as he's got everything, he's got power, he's got authority, he can do what he wants. I could maybe plead to him and he could set me free. He doesn't look envious layover at Darius, and he doesn't even try and persuade Darius. And I think that's a good principle. Darius, interestingly in this story, there's more about Darius than there is about Daniel. And when Daniel's thrown in the den, he would think the Scripture would speak about what Daniel was thinking, but it actually speaks about what Darius was thinking, that he was miserable, he was upset, he didn't have any entertainment that night, he couldn't sleep, because God was working in his conscience, and Daniel could leave that for God to do. And Daniel could know that God will use his faithfulness to convict others in a positive way. And then faith, I think, or trust involves that gentle and confident testimony. It's understated, isn't it? The only words from

Daniel they're worth looking at, aren't they? Because they're the only words that he speaks in this chapter, verse 22, my God sent his angel and shut the lion's mouth, they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him and also before you, oh king, I've done no harm. Understated, it's so often the way of Scripture. Understated, miracle but no drama, supernatural but no sensation. We do have him coming out and saying, wow, the smell in there was appalling, and I'm traumatized by lions' faces in my head all day, but not eating me. It was a terrible occasion. What in earth was God doing? There's nothing like that. There's just that simple, gentle testimony. I think so often, and you'll accuse me of this, of just talking too much. But his life was so visible to all, he didn't need a million words to go with it. I think we need sometimes less chat and more godly immersion. And people will see it, it's not saying that we don't chat, we have to chat, we have to tell them, but in a very understated way. So trust is definitely about, or how can we face the unwanted in our lives by trust? And lastly, in very, very brief ways, by seeing the bigger picture as well. And Scripture, we've seen this again and again and again in our Old Testament studies particularly, Scripture's a common theme. And it's pointing to, it's all about rescue and about redemption ultimately through Jesus Christ. And Daniel is a, well, I've called him anyway, I may be wrong theologically, and others will correct me, I've called him a prototype Christian. So he's before Christ, but he points to Christ, and he points to the Christian way, but he's a prototype Christian, but he does point to

Christ himself. He was righteous, not truly righteous because he trusted in the coming redeemer, but he was silent in the face of unjust accusations. He was judged by a weak and conscience stricken political leader. He faced certain death. A stone was rolled over the entrance of the pit. It was sealed with a king's signet ring. He had heavenly company. There was resurrection at daylight. There was a declaration of peace. All of that does point forward to something greater. And the Old Testament Hebrew believers often cited Daniel as a reason for their belief in the resurrection because they saw his going into the pit and coming out as a picture of resurrection and the hope of the resurrection.

[28 : 34] But there is shades even within that of a bigger rescue, isn't there? The lions in the lion's den, they have a spiritual depiction in the Bible, and the lions depict spiritual realities. They are the kings of the jungle. Lions are always the kings of the jungle, and they reflect power therefore. And I think in the Bible both good power and evil power.

And on the cross Christ faced the darkness of a cosmic pit, but for him the lions' mouths were not shut. He faced both the power of God's good wrath against sin and also the dark powers of satanic opposition and hell's worst. He faced God's wrath and God's justice.

Amos 3 verse 8, I'm sure if we've got that, we've got one or two weeks of text here in conclusion. The lion has roared speaking about God's justice who will not fear. The Lord God has spoken who can but prophesy. So the lions speak often in the Bible of God's justice, but also in 1 Peter 5 verse 8 speaks of, as you know, the adversary of the devil, like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. And in the great prophetic Psalm 22 we have these words, prophetic messianic words, they open their wide mouths at me like a ravening and roaring lion. So Jesus uses this picture of the opposition that he faced on the cross, and the lions' mouths were shut for Daniel because they were not shut for Jesus. And the lions' mouths of God's wrath against sin and death and darkness are shut for us because they weren't shut for Jesus Christ who took our battle and died in our place, our broken hearts and our displaced loves. He took them in our place. There's a great verse in Exodus 14 verse 14, the Lord will fight for you and you have only to be silent.

And that goes back to the trust thing. That's what he promises to do. He promises to be the one who fights on our behalf spiritually against God's just wrath against us because we're all failures by his standards of perfect love towards him and one another. And the powers of darkness that would grab us, the powers of death that we are all under unless we come by faith to the one who is one the victory for us. And that is because he loved the world so much. And in that biblical imagery he himself becomes the great lion of the tribe of Judah as we're told in Revelation 5.5. One of the others says, weep no more, behold the lion of the tribe of Judah. The root of David is conquered so he can open the scroll and the seven seals. So there's a great mixing of the imagery biblically but all helps us to understand his peace and his grace and his salvation that Daniel does speak of.

And just in conclusion there's a future element I think even within this story in Revelation 11 verse 6 where the peace that Daniel experienced in the den where the lion's mouths were closed was a reminder to him of something future he may have not understood fully and nor do we in many ways. But that picture of the new heavens and the new earth where the wolf shall lie down with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the ungod and the calf and the lion and the fattened and calf together and the little child shall lead them. That picture of no more dis-peace, of a universe at peace with itself because of Christ's redemption that new heavens and the new earth were in dwells righteousness where there will be excellence and no exile where there will be joy and peace and harmony which we look forward to. Daniel look forward to getting back into the promised land as it were as a picture. We have a promised land and new heavens and a new earth where in righteousness and peace dwell. So in Christ the challenge for you today in worship and tomorrow at work is can you dare to be a Daniel?

[33 : 16] Of course you can because Daniel's savior is our savior and it is through him and through dependence on him and that prayerful life and we were hoping to do a couple of sermons in the new year but the importance of our Bible reading and prayer and preaching through that the only way, a great way to start the year to think and remind ourselves of that significance. Father God help us to learn from you, to understand your word, to see its abiding relevance and its tremendous challenge to us to be people who will put our whole trust in you knowing that we simply are imperfect sinners who need a savior because without you we are under that terrible sentence of death and all that it means and so we pray for an urgency about us entrusting our lives to you and seeing and knowing what it means to know and love and follow Jesus. So help us we pray and bless us as we consider your word in Jesus name. Amen.