

“A STORY THAT CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE: DANIEL & THE LIONS DEN”

Rev. Becky Stephens

Text: Daniel 6:1-14 NLT

God’s Word: Daniel 6:15-28 NLT

A 1st-grader stood in front of his classroom to make a speech about "What he wanted to be when he grew up." He stood up in front of the class and said, "I'm going to be a lion tamer and have lots of fierce lions. I'll walk into the cage and they will roar... and they'll roar... and they'll..." And suddenly it occurred to him what he was saying... and he STOPPED, and he said, (PAUSE) "But of course, I'll have my mommy with me."

Now, why did that little boy suddenly decide he wanted his mommy with him? Because being surrounded by fierce roaring lions is pretty scary. In fact it was downright dangerous.

Back in 1898 two male lions stalked a Railroad construction crew in Uganda and were believed to have killed about 135 victims. Then in 1932 a pride of lions went on a killing spree that left 1500 men, women and children dead. Lions are dangerous animals.

Now Lions don't ordinarily kill PEOPLE, but if there's nothing else to eat... they WILL eat you. In Babylon, the King apparently kept a few lions around to do just that. If somebody angered him...the offending parties became the main course and the menu.

Now KIDS love this story. It has everything. Danger, adventure, suspense... and a really cool ending. In fact, one source called this "One of the best loved stories in the Bible."

That's nice. But the question is... WHY? Why is this even a story in the Bible? Why did God put it here for us to read? I ask that kind of question every time I prepare a sermon to preach on Sunday: Why is this story important to me?

Every week when I prepare my sermons I do a great deal of searching on the Internet to get background information on the text I'm using. As I googled this story about Daniel and the Lions' Den, I kept repeatedly coming across an interesting "search tag". It read: "The Most Important Bible Story - This One Can Change Your Life." Well alright! That's got to be pretty good stuff. So I clicked on it and found it had nothing at all to do with Daniel. I mean it talked a little about Jesus and His death, burial and resurrection... but essentially it was simply a 3 minute video with a talking head (the preacher at that church I presume) advertising a certain church. Apparently, it's a sales concept that various churches have purchased because they all used the same search tag but there were different talking heads each time.

Now, I understand the importance of advertising on the Internet and these churches are free to spend their money any way they see fit... but I have to admit: I WAS REALLY ANNOYED BY THIS.

Then I shared my experience online with a clergy friend of mine. She googled the story but never once found the tag line I'd seen. So I thought – I'll search for it on my cell phone... and I couldn't find it. I went back home to my computer and there they were about 8 times this "The Most Important Bible Story..."

And I started to wonder... was God trying get my attention here? Was God actually trying to get me to see that this story of Daniel in the Lion's Den really was "A Very Important Bible Story - One That Can Change Our Lives?" Well, of course it is... but the question was why?

Then I started putting it together. 1st – this story about the Lion’s Den was a story about weakness.

Hebrews 11:33-34 talks about those *“who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions... (and) out of weakness were made strong...”*

REALLY?

Then in 2 Corinthians 12:9 God tells Paul *“My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness....”*

Without Jesus we’re weak. We need Jesus or we’ll accomplish nothing of any lasting value. No matter how important you may be, no matter how rich, how well connected, how famous, or how well you think you know the Bible...you have nothing of value without Jesus. We’re weak. We need Him.

Now, think about this - in this story, Daniel’s an old man. He’s probably in his late 70s or 80s. He’s well-respected and highly honored by the King... but he’s no spring chicken anymore. And his enemies believe that he’s just a doddering old fool they can easily destroy. All they need do is find a chink in his armor and he’ll fold up like a cheap suit. He’s an old man. He’ll never stand up against the criticism. They’re jealous of the respect he has in the King’s court and they think any guy that’s been in government as long as Daniel has got to be corrupt. So they go digging for dirt... but there isn’t any!

- No Sexual Immorality
- No Embezzlement
- No Betrayal
- No Palace Intrigue

There’s nothing!!! You can’t touch this guy. Daniel is an honest and blameless man. As Daniel 6:4 tell us *“(They) sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him.”* Well bummer.

So they get to thinking...what can we do to take this guy down? I mean – he’s such a religious guy that he refuses to be corrupted. He’d never do anything to offend his...

Wait a minute! That’s what we’ll do. We’ll attack his faith in his God!!!

Daniel 6:5 *“Then these men said, ‘We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.’”*

That’s his Achilles heel! The man is unswervingly religious. That’s his weakness!

You know, that’s how worldly people view us. They look at our commitment to Christ and they mock us. What fools to place their faith in something they can’t see. They view us as weak and vulnerable.

Sometime back I read an article by someone who claimed that Stonewall Jackson was a flawed Civil War General. It claimed that one of Jackson’s weaknesses as a General was his faith in Christ. Someone else noted *“(Jackson) neither smoked, drank, nor played cards, and sometimes refused to march or fight on Sundays.”* And the article argued that a GREAT general would never shy from a fight on Sundays. Any general worth his salt would have fought on whatever day they had to to win. In that author’s opinion -- Refusing to march or fight on Sundays was a major drawback.

And as I read that article... I thought to myself – for a flawed General Jackson, he certainly scared the wits out of the Union Army and he won just about every fight he was in. I even read of one conflict where Jackson took on 3 separate Union Armies totaling 64,000 men, and beat them all! I’m pretty sure Jackson’s faith was NOT a weakness.

Now, my point is this: because of your faith, many in the world will always look on you as weak, ignorant and vulnerable. They'll laugh at you. They'll ridicule you and make fun of you. They'll talk about you behind your back. And they'll do all that because they see your faith...as weakness.

But this is a Bible Story about the Lion's Den that can change your life. Daniel's faith was HIS strength. His faith was why he stood strong. His faith was why he survived the hatred of his enemies.

That's why Hebrews 11:33-34 tells us about those *"who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions... (and) out of weakness were made strong..."*

That's why God told Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9 *"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness...."*

Just like Daniel... our STRENGTH comes from our faith in God. And it's out of our weakness that (thru Him) we are made strong. It's in our weakness that God's strength becomes perfect.

So, the 1st thing we see in this story is our weakness... and God's strength.

The 2nd thing we see is the power of COURAGE. As one person noted: "Courage does not consist of feeling no fear, but in conquering fear. He is the hero who, seeing the lions on either side, goes straight on, because that is where his duty lies."

As I was preparing for today's sermon I went through several YouTube videos looking for lions killing and eating things... and I decided that was just too gory to do. I mean most of you are going out to eat after church and I don't want to throw off your appetite. But one of the videos on YouTube was a National Geographic documentary entitled: "Lions, The Best Killers in the World." That video reflected something everyone has known for centuries: Lions are fierce and dangerous animals. Anyone who willing to face them is either foolish or courageous.

Now one of the things that troubled me about this story was that the King had this collection of lions in a den. That seemed odd. I mean he's got to keep them fed and you'd think he'd run out of victims after a while. But then (as I surfed the net) I came across an article by a scholar who noted:

"(A)ncient Near Eastern kings loved to depict themselves in battle with lions. And this image, along with the lion figure more generally, became a common symbol for royalty. The lions fought by these kings were typically corralled and caged, not encountered in the wild. That means, of course, that these lions would have to have been kept somewhere..."

So Kings kept lions for sport. They loved to battle lions to prove their courage and manhood. They believed their courage was shown in their ability to kill these mighty beasts.

But Daniel was in his late 70s or 80s. He's not a mighty warrior... he's not going to kill any lions. If he'd ever battled a lion... that day is long since gone. Now he's just a defenseless old man facing certain death.

But in spite of that, Daniel is seen here as a man of courage and faith. He calls forth to Darius: *"My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm."* Daniel 6:22.

King Darius didn't sleep at all--all night long. But Daniel was a different story. In my mind's eye I can picture Daniel stepping into the Den of Lions...and there's God. And I can see God putting His hand on Daniel's shoulder and saying "It's OK. I've got this. You're going to be OK. And by the way – let me introduce you to the angel that's going to be keeping you company tonight."

Now Angels are powerful creatures. Scripture tells us that one angel took out 185,000 enemy soldiers in a single night. So, they're not beings that you really want to mess with. This angel's job – all night long – was to shut the mouths of the lions so that Daniel was safe. And I can picture Daniel just laying down in that Den and sleeping as soundly as if he was in his own bed.

Daniel slept because he knew he wasn't in danger. God was there with him. He was behaving kind of like that little boy who knew he'd have courage in a cage filled with fierce roaring lions BECAUSE he'd be safe if his mommy was there with him.

It's like God had told his people in Deuteronomy: *"Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."* Deuteronomy 31:6

Now why would Daniel's God not leave him, or forsake him? Well, because Daniel refused to leave/forsake his God. Daniel 6:10 *"When Daniel knew that the document had been signed (making it illegal to make a petition to any god or man for thirty days), he went to his house where he had WINDOWS in his upper chamber OPEN toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously."*

Now, did Daniel know of the command that he was not to pray? Of course he did! But in spite of the law, Daniel DELIBERATELY went right up to his room. He deliberately left his windows OPEN and deliberately gets down on his KNEES.

Now you do realize, you don't need to get down on your knees to pray. You can pray with hands stretched out to heaven, you can pray laying down on the floor, you can bow-
B your head in prayer... or you could just close your eyes and pray. Now, Daniel could have been subtle about it. He could have just closed his eyes and pretended to be resting.

"Hey Daniel, you praying?"

"Nope... just resting my eyes!"

Nooo. Daniel didn't do anything like that. He went through all that he did so that there would be no mistaking the fact he was praying. He was boldly declaring that he loved God too much to dishonor him by turning away from his God in fear of what others would do to him. He makes it very clear to anyone who cares to look HE WILL pray to God no matter what the cost.

Never be afraid to stand up for God. Because when you do... God notices. God is watching to see if you have enough faith to put Him first in a world that is often hostile to our faith.

One last thing about this story that can change your life: when you stand up for Him, God just might let you change the world around you. Notice what God did thru Daniel when Daniel was willing to stand up for Him. God didn't just stop the mouths of the lions and take vengeance on Daniel's enemies... God also changed Daniel's world:

"Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: 'Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.'" Daniel 6:25-27

This One Story Can Change Your Life... if it convinces you to stand for God. If you have the courage to stand for God. If you have the courage to make your way forward in faith even when surrounded by lions on every side. THEN God will allow you to change the world. Maybe the whole world... but at least in your world. AMEN