

Main Idea: There are six situations in the familiar story of Daniel 6 which will help us to have a proper view of our great God (even when we're in the pits!).

- I. Situation #1: The Promotion (1-5)
- II. Situation #2: The Plot (6-9)
- III. Situation #3: The Prayer (10-14)
- IV. Situation #4: The Pit (16-18)
 - A. Daniel was in the pit (16-17).
 - B. Darius was in the pits (18).
 1. There was no food.
 2. There was no entertainment.
 3. There was no sleep.
- V. Situation #5: The Protection (19-24)
 - A. Darius's request questions God's reputation (19-20).
 1. Is God real?
 2. Is God able?
 3. Is God willing?
 - B. Daniel's response honors God's reputation (21-24).
 1. God is personal.
 2. God protects.
 3. God prevails.
- VI. Situation #6: The Proclamation (25-28)
 - A. Fear God.
 - B. Know God.
 1. He's great.
 2. He's gracious.

Make It Personal: Consider two things...

1. The lesson: God is great.
2. The question: Is He great in my life?

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11

The Bible talks about lions more than we might think at first. Lions are mentioned 37 times in the Scriptures. There's the lion that Samson killed in Judges 14:5, and the lions that killed two prophets, one in 1 Kings 13:24 and the other in 1 Kings 20:36.

There's the psalmist praying, “Save me from the lion’s mouth,” in Psalm 22:21. Paul says he was “rescued out of the lion’s mouth” in 2 Timothy 4:17. Hebrews 11:33 speaks of those who “by faith...shut the mouths of lions.” 1 Peter 5:8 speaks of our adversary, the devil, who “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

Judah is called “a lion’s whelp” in Genesis 49:9. And here’s an interesting reference. In Jeremiah 12:8 the Lord speaks and says, ““My inheritance has become to Me like a lion in the forest; She has roared against Me; Therefore I have come to hate her.”

Revelation 5:5 speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ as “the lion from the tribe of Judah.” Isaiah 11:6 anticipates the day “when the wolf will dwell with the lamb...and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them.”

Since we don't see lions around here, I did some research and learned this.²

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this passage, see the Daniel series at WBC in 1996.

² <http://www.worldwildlife.org/blogs/good-nature-travel/posts/ten-interesting-facts-about-lions>

Male lions defend the pride's territory while females do most of the hunting. Despite this, the males eat first.

You can hear a lion's roar as far as five miles away.

A lion can run for short distances at 50 mph and leap as far as 36 feet.

A lion's heels don't touch the ground when it walks.

A lion may sleep up to 20 hours a day.

Lions and tigers are so closely related that if you shaved them you wouldn't be able to tell them apart.³

So the Bible talks quite a bit about lions. But not simply for information sake. The Bible shows how God uses lions to teach us, about Himself, about our enemy, about our Messiah and messianic hope, and about the kind of peace He gives when we trust in Him.

With that final thought in mind, this morning we're going to meet some of the best known lion's in the Bible, those that Daniel faced when thrown into the lions' den in Daniel 6.

A lion's den. What can God do with a lion's den? He can let the world know that He's in a class all by Himself, that's what. As we're about to see.

We need Daniel 6, for if we live long enough we too will face the lion's den. And if we face the lion's den, we will have opportunity to see our God do what only our God can do.

Our friends, Barry and Katherine White and their teenage son Isaac, are facing it. Last week Barry let us know that Isaac's cancer has returned to his lungs and next week they'll be repeating the surgery they did last year, opening his chest and manually seeking to remove the cancer.

I received a prayer request last week from Pastor Peter, a Ranglong Bible translator in India. "Please pray for us. Last week, some of our young men were stopped and money was asked/demanded for a puja for one of the gods (standard practice here). They said they could not give because they were Christians. The men that were asking beat them up quite badly. When people learned what had happened there was a great outcry and a banh (strike) to demand the arrest of the men who had done it. Leaders from the government came to try to negotiate a settlement, but the men who did the beating are the sons of local government officers, so they will not arrest them."⁴

The lion's den is inevitable for the follower of Jesus. But should it come, or *when* it comes, our hope lies in the knowledge that our God is up to something for His glory and our good in the lion's den.

In Daniel 6, Daniel faced six situations which will help us to have a proper view of our great God even when we're in the lion's den. We looked at the first three situations last week, which we'll review, and then consider the final three.

I. Situation #1: The Promotion (1-5)

Daniel was a man in his eighties at the time the Babylonians fell to the Medo-Persian Empire. He had been in public service for over 60 years, and as had happened frequently before, Daniel once again rose to the top. According to verse 2 Daniel was appointed by

³ <http://www.livescience.com/27404-lion-facts.html>

⁴ Letter from BI, April 2016.

King Darius to the position of one of the top three administrators and was facing a promotion to become the king's number two man.

So God was up to something in Daniel's promotion. But not what you might expect.

II. Situation #2: The Plot (6-9)

Some of Daniel's political associates were jealous of him, and devised a plot to get rid of him. They tricked King Darius into passing a law that made it illegal for anyone to pray to any god (save the king) for thirty days. And the king blindly signed it.

But Daniel prayed anyway, choosing to face the penalty of the lion's den.

III. Situation #3: The Prayer (10-14)

Verse 10, "Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before."

So God gave Daniel a platform, a position of prestige, but Daniel didn't worship that platform. No, he worshiped God alone, and he used his platform to honor God, even if it meant losing, not just the platform, but his own life.

What are you doing with the platform God has given you?

IV. Situation #4: The Pit (16-18)

Follow along as I read verses 16-18, "So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, 'May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!' ¹⁷ A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. ¹⁸ Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep."

Notice the condition of our two main characters.

A. Daniel was in the pit (16-17). We don't know for sure how the ancients constructed this particular lion's den. Such dens have been discovered in Morocco which consisted of a large, square, underground cavern, with a partition wall in the middle. The partition wall had a door which the keeper could open and close from the top, and by throwing in food, he could entice the animals to one chamber and vacate the other for the purposes of cleaning.

In Daniel's case, he was cast into the pit with the lions. As far as Daniel's critics were concerned, that was the end of Daniel. Daniel was in a predicament, a hopeless pit.

Actually, he wasn't alone...

B. Darius was in the pits (18). I remind you that Darius was king. His word was law. He ruled the most powerful empire in the world of his day. He was in control. But for the first time in his life, he discovered the startling truth that he was *not* in control. He was helpless.

Of course, none of us are in control either, not really, though we like to think we are. You may have a certain amount of authority at work, but you're not in control. And you may have huge dreams, but you are not in control. The variables are beyond your reach.

That's what Darius learned that day, and the reality of it sent him into the pits. How do I know? According to verse 18, three things were missing from his normal routine.

1. *There was no food.* "Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating." Darius didn't eat. Why not? For one reason, because he liked Daniel. Daniel had been a trusted worker, one whom he planned to set over his entire kingdom (3). For another reason, because he'd been trapped by his own words. He probably felt like a fool that night. His pride had led him to believe the flattery, and make a foolish decision.

Pride always does that, you know. It blinds us. It trips us up.

So for Darius, no food that night.

2. *There was no entertainment.* As the AV puts it, "Neither were instruments of music brought before him." As king, he had every pleasure known to man at his disposal. But he was in no mood for pleasure that night.

3. *There was no sleep.* I have a hunch that Daniel enjoyed a night of perfect peace for Psalm 4:8 states, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety."

That's ironic, isn't it? Daniel was in the pit, but Darius was in the pits.

A word of application. Are you looking for peace of mind? You won't find it in a bottle or in a pill or by drowning yourself in entertainment or in your job. Why not? Because you don't find something by looking where you did not lose it.

Where did we lose the peace of God? We lost it, the Bible says, in the garden of Eden when our forefather and mother disobeyed God and cut off the human race from Him.

No God, no peace. To return to peace, we must return to God.

Isaiah 26:3 explains (in the AV), "Thou wilt keep him in **perfect peace**, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."

But of course we don't trust in Him unless we know Him. And to know Him we must, by His sovereign grace, receive His Son as our Savior and Lord.

V. Situation #5: The Protection (19-24)

Verse 19 informs us what the king did, "At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den." Why did the king go to the den? Did he really expect Daniel to be alive? Did he really expect Daniel's God to intervene?

Here's a pagan king, but God is using this lion's den experience to open his eyes to some eternal realities.

By the way, do you really expect, do you truly anticipate that God is going to use the lion's den experiences in your life to put Himself on display? He delights to do so.

Do you know what was on the line the day Darius went to the den? Nothing short of this, *God's reputation*.

Listen to Darius in verse 20, "When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, 'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?'"

A. Darius's request questions God's reputation (19-20).

Darius's words reveal that he had three questions about God.

1. *Is God real?* Notice how the king refers to God in verse 20, "Daniel, servant of the *living* God." I tend to think there was uncertainty in Darius' voice when he said

this. "Daniel, you've always said that your God is living, unlike mine. But is He really? Is He real?"

Would you rather be a king with a dead god or a servant of the living God? Be careful how you answer. To serve the living God means we may face some lion's den experiences. But in the pit, we (and those around us) will discover if our God is real.

2. *Is God able?* Verse 20 again, "Daniel... has your God, whom you serve continually, been *able* to rescue you from the lions?"

That's a good question to ponder. Is He *able*? Darius didn't know the answer. Sadly, some of us who claim to know God act as though we don't know the answer either. Granted, we say God is able, and we sing that God is able, but when push comes to shove, we live as though He's not able.

Martin Luther struggled with depression at times. One time it lingered for weeks, until Katy, his wife, took action. She dressed in black wearing attire appropriate for a funeral service, and entered the room where her Martin was. Luther asked her, "Why are you dressed like that?" Katy replied, "Haven't you heard?" "Heard what?" Luther responded. "God died," she said. "Don't be silly," said Martin. To which Katy said, "Well, He must be dead the way you're acting. And furthermore, I disagree with the way you translated Romans 8:28. You must have got that part wrong."

Needless to say, Martin Luther got the point.

3. *Is God willing?* In the AV it says, "O Daniel...is thy God able to deliver thee from the lions?" You see, Darius figured that God could be real and able, but not willing. What if He *could* but chose *not* to help? The crunch time experiences reveals our God-concept.

It did for Darius. He wasn't sure. Is God real? Is God able? Is God willing?

Dear friends, I want you to know that the God of the Bible is real, able, and willing. But willing to do what?

We could read this story and conclude, "Yes, God exists to get me out of jams, to make life comfortable for me. Sort of a cosmic bellhop."

But of course, He doesn't exist for us, and what He is willing to do is whatever brings Him maximum glory, for that in turn brings His creation maximum good.

Outside of the Bible, no one says it better than Jonathan Edwards. "God's purpose for my life," says Edwards, "was that I have a passion for God's glory and that I have a passion for my joy in that glory, and that these two are one passion."

And why would that be the case? Edwards explains:

God is the highest good of the reasonable creature. The enjoyment of him is our proper; and is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Better than fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of any, or all earthly friends. These are but shadows; but the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams; but God is the sun. These are but streams; but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.⁵

So yes, God is real, able, and willing to do whatever will maximize in us a passion for His glory which will then maximize our joy.

⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 17: Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733*

That's why He's able and willing to deliver you from sin's guilt and give you His peace. And He's able and willing to deliver you from vicious habits that have bound you for years. These actions will bring Him glory and bring you joy.

But how do we experience this God-glorifying help? By trusting in yourself and in your ability to make things better? No. Frances Havergal revealed the simple answer in the refrain of the hymn "Like a River Glorious."

*Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest,
finding as He promised, perfect peace and rest.*

There at the pit, Darius questioned God's reputation. I'm not sure that Darius really expected to hear anything more than silence and the growl of the lions. But he was elated to hear a familiar voice.

I find it interesting to note how Daniel did *not* respond to Darius' question, "Is your God able to deliver you?" He didn't say, "Yes, He's able, but no thanks to you." Nor did he give the king the silent treatment, like we're prone to do when we're one up on someone who's caused us pain.

Notice Daniel's response in verse 21, "May the king live forever!" Sort of the Aramaic equivalent of "Long live the king!"

Daniel is a great model for how to respond to those who hurt us. The world says, "So if your ex wrongs you, and you get a chance to get even, by all means, you need to show some self-respect and do it." And if that prodigal son embarrasses you, by all means, show some tough love and put him in his place."

That's how the world operates. Tit for tat.

But not Daniel. He practiced Ephesians 4:31-32, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Now notice the contrast here. First, Darius questions God's reputation. But Daniel?

B. Daniel's response honors God's reputation (21-24).

Verse 22, "My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty."

What happened that night is actually a beautiful picture of what the Bible says will happen in the coming one thousand year reign of Christ. During the millennial kingdom, man will be restored to the position of dominion he forfeited when he sinned in the garden of Eden. The redeemed humanity will care for the created order, and the created order will submit to this care. The lion will lie down with the lamb.

In Daniel 6, God gave Daniel a sampling of the powers of the world to come.

What's more, Daniel's response teaches us three important truths about God.

1. *God is personal.* Listen again to Daniel in verse 22 "MY God has sent His angel." To Darius, the Living God was a stranger. Not to Daniel. He's *my* God.

Can you say that with confidence? Is God personal to you? Do you have assurance that you are His and He is yours?

2. *God protects.* Verse 22 again, "My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me." What an awesome God! He sent His angel and shut the lion's mouths. The king of the jungle is no match for God.

My God sent *His angel*. There is much we do not know about these spirit beings, but the Scriptures give us enough to know they are powerful ministering servants of God.

The Psalmist said, "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways (Psalm 91:11)."

Hebrews 1:14 elaborates, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

Psalm 34:7 reveals, "The angel of the LORD encamps round about them that fear Him, and delivers them."

And Psalm 103:20 adds, "Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word."

So God sent His angel to protect Daniel.

Why did God spare Daniel? For two reasons mentioned here. First, according to verse 22, because he was innocent. "They have not hurt me, *because I was found innocent in his sight*. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty."

We see the second reason God spared Daniel in verse 23. "The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, *because he had trusted in his God*."

The Law is summed up in these two commands: Love God and love your neighbor. Daniel did both. He loved and trusted God, and He was innocent before the king because he had wronged no man. So God protected him.

So Daniel's response teaches us three things about God. God is personal. God protects. Thirdly...

3. *God prevails*. The skeptic might say, "Well, maybe there's a rational explanation for what happened to Daniel. Maybe the lions weren't hungry. Or maybe they were sleeping, since you said that's what they do up to twenty hours a day."

You think? Take a look at verse 24, "At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones."

Undoubtedly, Daniel didn't gloat over the fate of his foes. What happened to them wasn't his idea, but the king's, and was an example of typical oriental justice.⁶ Under the Mosaic law, God did not penalize the wives and children along with those guilty of attempted murder (Deut 24:16). What Darius did was in keeping with pagan laws, not God's law.

One thing's for sure. The Medes and Persians learned a lesson that day. You don't trifle with the God of the Jews. And that brings us to the sixth and final situation.

VI. Situation #6: The Proclamation (25-28)

The proclamation was twofold.

A. Fear God. Verses 25-26a, "Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth: 'May you prosper greatly! ²⁶ "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.'"

⁶ Strauss, 194

Talk about changing one's tune! This is Darius' second decree in two days. The first said, "No one is to petition any god but me." The second says, "Everyone is to reverence the God of Daniel."

This is at least the third king that Daniel influenced for the Lord. Two responded with kingdom-wide proclamations (Nebuchadnezzar and Darius), while one refused to humble himself (Belshazzar).

So it can happen, brothers and sisters. Even in hostile settings, God's people can influence lost people, even world rulers, to fear the Lord.

But not just fear God. Secondly...

B. Know God. That's the second element of King Darius's proclamation.

Verses 26b-28 "For he is the living God [remember Darius wasn't sure about that back in verse 20] and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. ²⁷ He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

So what do we learn about God from Darius' proclamation? Two things.

1. *He's great.* He's living. He endures forever. He's the king whose kingdom will not be destroyed. He's the sovereign whose dominion will never end.

2. *He's gracious.* He's performs signs and wonders, that is, He does things no one else can do so people will know He exists. Specifically, He delivers and rescues. He delivered Daniel from the lions.

Daniel is exhibit A that God is great and God is gracious. And by God's grace he just keeps on keeping on, as the final verse 28 indicates, "So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian."

Don't miss an important contrast in this chapter. We see two approaches as to how to get people to fear and know God. Darius did it by legislation. Daniel did it by his God-centered life.

Man loves to use the outside-in approach. Why, even the Nazi soldiers had embossed on their belt buckles the motto, *Gott mit uns*, "God with us."

But it's not outside-in, but inside-out. When a person comes to know and trust in the Lord, as did Daniel in his heart, it shows up on the outside for all to see.

I can force my children to obey me, at least when they're small, but I can't force them to love and trust me. Inside-out.

But how will a sinner ever do that? How *could* a sinner? After all, as sinners we are enslaved to our self-bent, which we exhibit from the moment we enter this world, going, not God's way, but our own.

Daniel points us to the answer. The answer isn't in Daniel. Oh, the Lord gave Daniel a series of visions, which we'll see in coming studies, that let us know it's coming. God is going to send the Deliverer into the world, the King of kings, which He did.

Jesus came to transform sinners inside-out. The King went to a cross on a hill outside of Jerusalem, where He took His people's sins upon Himself, and died for them, paying their penalty, breaking their power. Then on the third day, He conquered death, and now lives to rescue those sinners who call on Him in repentance and faith.

So let's consider two things as we make it personal. The lesson, and a question.

Make It Personal: Consider two things...

1. The lesson: God is great.

If we come away from this story enamored with Daniel and the lions, or fascinated with Darius and his behavior, we've missed the main character. Which of course is God.

The point of Daniel 6 is that God is great. In fact, there's none greater. A king is no match for Him. Nor is a mob of jealous political foes, or even a den of hungry lions. God is great.

I think the key phrase of the entire chapter is found at the end of verse 23, where we're told why Daniel was delivered from the pit, "Because he *had trusted* in his God."

Can I ask you something? No games now. Do you trust in God, or don't you? Do you trust Him enough to do whatever He asks of you, no strings attached?

Are you willing to trust in His provision of a Savior? Are you willing to entrust your life to the Savior, come what may?

Don't misunderstand. In terms of our salvation, Jesus paid it all. We add nothing to our justification before God. But in terms of the Christian life, the Scriptures beckon us to count the cost.

Paul admitted, "I die daily (1 Cor 15:31)." Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and mammon (Mt 6:24)." John exhorted, "Love not the world (1 Jn 2:15)." Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego testified when facing the fiery furnace, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us...but if He doesn't, be it known that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image (Dan 3:17-18)."

So there's the lesson. God is great. Now the question.

2. The question: Is He great in my life?

I invite you to count the cost this morning. What steps are you willing to take today to let it be known that you want God to be great in your life?

I mentioned last time that one problem we have on Sundays is that we hear the Word of God, get convicted, and then leave before we give sufficient time and thought to allow God to change us.

So let's spend time in prayer. With heads bowed, think about the following statement by E. M. Bounds (*Prayer and Revival*): "The spirit of prayer cannot be in harmony with the spirit of entertainment in the church of God. If every church would discard the entertainment business, cease making God's house a house of merchandise, make His house the house of prayer, and commit itself in penitent earnestness to prevailing prayer, our revival stream would run ocean floods and all our churches would be aflame with God's glory and resonant with His praises and the Lord would add daily to our churches thousands of the saved. Then the beauty of the Lord our God would be upon us."

During this prayer time, if you would like to kneel while you pray, please do so.