

Have you ever been in the pits? Even the most devout saints go through down times. 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.

My friends, God is great (say it aloud). But the question is this. Is He great in your life? It's when we're in the pits that we find out how great God is in our eyes. Our aim this morning is to learn how to magnify the greatness of God in our lives.

**Proposition: 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.

Implications:

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

We looked at the first three situations last week in verses 1-15. They were as follows.

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\*\*\*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.

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. He was appointed by King Darius to the position of "president" and was facing a promotion to become the king's number-two man.

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 and faced the penalty of the lion's den.

III. Situation #3: The Prayer (10-14) Geoff Gorsuch wrote an interesting article in *Discipleship Journal* entitled "True Patriotism." In it he examines the actions of Daniel. Here's what he has to say about Daniel's prayer in chapter six (Issue 18, p. 8), "Knowing the risk, Daniel fell to his knees in prayer, 'as was his custom' (6:10). He was not brave, neither was he a fanatic. He was neither resigned nor fatalistic. *He simply could do no other.* The issue was ultimately his own identity: who he was personally, the object of his hope and the focus of his being. He was a prisoner of a lifetime of choices, and of the character these choices had wrought. He was powerless. He feared God."

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 his own life. What are you doing with the platform God has given you?

Two weeks ago, one of our young people unashamedly used her God-given platform to honor God. Megan Wawro was recognized as salutatorian of her graduating class. In her speech, she shared these words: "I think a good model to examine is Solomon. He had all that anyone could ever want: his own kingdom, surpassing wisdom, incredible wealth, pleasure, and political success. He was not happy, however. He ultimately realized that all of this was worthless without a reason to live; for him and for me that reason is a belief in Jesus Christ as Savior." That's using your platform for God!

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

Follow along as I read verses 16-18 from the LB, "So at last the king gave the order for Daniel's arrest, and he was taken to the den of lions. The king said to him, 'May your God, whom you worship continually, deliver you.' And then they threw him in. A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring, and that of his government, so that no one could rescue Daniel from the lions. Then the king returned to his palace and went to bed without dinner. He refused his usual entertainment and didn't sleep all night." 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. Even an optimist would have to admit that Daniel was in a jam! 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.

By the way, none of us are in control either, though we like to think we are. Mr. Businessman, you may have power, but you're not in control. Miss young person, you may have huge dreams, but you are not in control. The variables are beyond your control.

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

1. *There was no food.* "Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting." 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.

2. *There was no entertainment.* "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." How ironic! 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 at the point we left God out of our lives. We'll recover it when we go back to that point. Isaiah 26:3 explains, "Thou wilt keep him in **perfect peace**, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."

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

V 19 informs us what the king did, "Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions." 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?

By the way, do you really expect--do you truly anticipate that God is going to make a difference in your life? Ladies with unsaved husbands, when you pray and ask God to work in your man's heart and bring Him to Christ, do you expect Him to act?

Do you know what was on the line the day Darius went to the den? God's reputation.

**A. Darius's request questions God's reputation (19-20).** In anguish (20), Darius shouted to Daniel in the pit. His words revealed that he had three questions about God.

1. *Is God real?* Notice how the king refers to God in v 20, "O 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 you may face some lion's den experiences. But in the pit, you (and those around you) will discover if your God is real.

2. *Is God able?* V 20 again, "O Daniel...is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee." Ponder that question. 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. Oh, 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.

3. *Is God willing?* "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? Crunch time experiences reveal our God-concept. It did for Darius. He wasn't sure--Is God real? Is God able? Is God willing?

Beloved, I want you to know God is real, able, and willing! What's He able and willing to do? He's able and willing to deliver you from sin's guilt and give you peace. He's able to deliver you from vicious habits that have bound you for years. He's able and willing to give you a new purpose in life. But how do we experience His help?

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, "In your face king!" Nor, "Yes, He's able, but no thanks to you." And he didn't give the king the silent treatment (like we do when we're one up on someone). No, Daniel responded with these words (21), "Then Daniel said to the king, O king, live forever (which is the Aramaic equivalent of "Long live the king!")."

How should we respond to people who have wronged us? Daniel is a great model to follow (he certainly was wronged). The world says, "If your ex-spouse wronged you, and you get a chance to get even, do it." And, "If your prodigal child embarrassed you, disown him." That's how the world operates--tit for tat. Not Daniel.

He practiced Ephesians 4:31-32 (NIV), "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."

Darius had questioned God's reputation, but...

**B. Daniel's response honors God's reputation (21-24).** "My God has sent His angel and has shut the lion's mouths, that they have not hurt me (22)." What happened that night is a beautiful picture of what the Bible says will happen in the Millennial Kingdom. In the kingdom, man will be restored to the position of dominion he forfeited in the garden of Eden, when he was God's vice-regent. Then, 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.* V 22 "MY God has sent His angel." To Darius, the Living God was a stranger. Not to Daniel. He's *my* God. Is God personal to you?

2. *God protects.* V 22 again, "My God has sent his angel and has shut the lion's mouths, that they have not hurt me." What a great God! He sent His angel and shut the lion's mouths. The king of the jungle is no match for God!

Do you believe in angels? There is much we do not know about these spirit beings, but the Scriptures give us a sketch of their activities. The Psalmist said, "For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways (Ps 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, "Bless ye the LORD, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word." God sent His angel to protect Daniel?

Why did God spare Daniel? For two reasons mentioned here. First, because he was innocent (22), "Forasmuch as before Him innocence was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt." The second reason God spared Daniel was because he believed in him, which we see in v 23, "Then was the king exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he *believed in his God.*"

The Law is summed up in these two commands: Love God and love your neighbor. Daniel did both. He trusted God, and He was innocent before the king. So God protected him.

3. *God prevails.* A critic might object and say, "Well, maybe the lions weren't hungry. That's why Daniel survived." You think so? Check out v 24 (LB), "Then the king issued a command to bring the men who accused Daniel, and throw them into the den along with their children and wives; and the lions leaped upon them and tore them apart before they even hit the bottom of the den." Not hungry? Sure!

Undoubtedly, Daniel didn't gloat over the fate of his foes. What happened to them was not his idea, but the king's, and was an example of typical Oriental justice (Strauss, 194). 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.

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

The proclamation was twofold.

**A. Fear God.** Vv 25-26 "Then King Darius wrote unto all people...I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel;" You have to admit this is quite a change! This is Darius' second decree in two days. The first said, "No one is to petition any god." The second said, "Everyone is to fear the God of Daniel!"

This is at least the third king that Daniel impacted for God. Two responded with proclamations (Nebuchadnezzar and Darius), while one refused to fear God (Belshazzar). In your life, are you leaving behind you a trail of people you've impacted for God?

**B. Know God.** Vv 26-28 "For He is the living God [remember Darius wasn't sure about that back in v 20], and steadfast forever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivers and rescues, and he works signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus, the Persian." What can we learn about God from Darius' proclamation? Two things.

1. *He's great.* He's living. He endures forever. He's sovereign.
2. *He's gracious.* He's performs signs and wonders. He delivers and rescues (27). He delivered Daniel (27).

Think about something. Some people reject God, and we know that's unacceptable. But it's just as unacceptable to seek God for the *wrong* reasons. Even as believers we are prone to do this. We admit we need God, and we call out to Him, but on our terms. We think He exists for us, and forget we exist for His glory.

The Special Police of the Third Reich (the S.S.) had embossed on their belt buckles this motto: "God with us." Aren't you staggered by the audacity of their presumptuous claim? Cold-hearted killers claiming that God is with us. Some of Satan's most devoted servants are religious people.

Don't miss an important contrast. We see two approaches as to how to get people to fear and know God in this chapter. Darius did it by legislation. Daniel did it by his obedient life. Which is more effective? Did you realize it's possible to obey God and *not* trust God? I can force my children to obey me, but I can't force them to trust me.

Implications: Don't miss two essentials.

1. *The lesson: God is great.* If you come away from this story enamored with Daniel and the lions, or fascinated with Darius and his behavior, you've missed the main character. It's God! The point of Daniel 6 is simply this. 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 v 23, where we're told why Daniel was delivered from the pit, "Because he *believed* in his God."

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

If so, then what price are you willing to pay to follow God? 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)."

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?

2. *The question: Is He great in my life?* God was great in Daniel's life. Is He in yours?

Response: 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. I want to give you a chance to respond.

1. Take personal inventory as Tammy sings "Will You Be the One?"

2. Make a personal commitment to the Lord by singing, "O Jesus, I Have Promised" #369 This is a prayer in song. Remain seated while singing.

(During the last verse) If you would like to say, "I believe God is great, and I want God to be great in my life," then I invite you to express that conviction before men by standing right where you are. By standing, you are saying, "I am not ashamed to let the world know that I want God to be great in my life."

3. 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, or come to the front to pray, please do so.

4. When God is great in our lives, we can know "It Is Well with My Soul." #493

5. Time of Giving--Since God has done so much for us, it's a privilege to give to Him. We give Him our tithes now, and our lives as we leave.