



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Daniel 6:1-28

Daniel

"A Night With Lions"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Thank you Mark, and good morning. We are continuing our studies in the Book of Daniel, and we are in a very familiar chapter of that book, chapter 6. Rather than read the entire chapter, I'm going to read verses 16 and 17 and then read a passage in Hebrews, chapter 11. But briefly, we read in Daniel 6:16:

"Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you." A stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing would be changed in regard to Daniel."

And now, in Hebrews 11:32, the author writes: "And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions."

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together this morning Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for this time together this morning, this Lord's day when we can gather together and we can open the Scriptures and read them, and then spend an extended period of time considering the meaning of the passage that we will look at this morning, a very familiar text to all of us. But a text that, while

perhaps familiar, is one that is filled with truths that have great application for this day and hour in which we live. That's one of the amazing things about this book. But every book in the Bible, all 56 books, we can turn to these books that are ancient, 2500 years old – some more than that – and they are as relevant today as they were then, which is a testimony to the inspiration of Scripture. This is our authority.

This is your Word given to us, and you have it for us for today, for this very day in which we live. There is an important lesson for each and every one of us. There's a lesson that is for all of us, generally, but, Lord, we are all people with different issues in life, different – we're in different places in life. We face different struggles to some degree or another. But this book has direct application to every circumstance and situation.

And so my prayer is that the Spirit of God will apply it, individually, to each and every one of us beyond anything that's said directly in the sermon this morning. The Spirit of God, who guides everything that we do, our minds, – He's the ultimate teacher here – that He would open our minds to the truth and give us an understanding of how these issues or these principles that are set forth in this book, in this particular chapter apply to each one of us. So bless us, Lord. Build us up in the faith, encourage us and give us a sense of your presence.

We're told in the Book of Revelation that Christ walks among the candlesticks, and He is walking here. He's with us. May we sense His presence and may He be built up in the faith because of our time in the Scriptures. So bless us spiritually, bless us materially, Lord. We have material needs, all of us. Daniel told Belshazzar that he was in God's hand, in your hand, and that you give him every breath of life that he takes. And well, we're no different from Belshazzar.

We, hopefully, are different in our character and our spiritual standing, but, as creatures, we are in your hand. What a blessing that is. That was a scary thought for him because he had mocked you and

blasphemed. And every blasphemer in this world has reason to tremble in great fear because they're in your hand and you give them every breath of life that they take. But for your people, what a blessing that is.

We are in the Lord God, and you are a mighty fortress for all of us. So we give you praise and thanks for that. We pray that you bless those that are going through particular difficulties now. But we're all dependent upon you materially, but some certainly have issues that need to be addressed and need to be corrected if it be your will. They're sick, they're facing surgery perhaps.

They are recovering from surgery or they're simply discouraged by the pressure of life, the difficulties of work, pressures that are in the home. You know what may be the issue, all kinds of issues out there, Lord, for your people. Encourage them and bless them. And those who are enjoying health and prosperity, give them a sense of gratitude for all of that because it comes from you. Everything we have comes from you, and we give you praise and thanks for that.

Father, of course, we just completed a national election, and as you instruct us, we pray for those who are in authority over us. We pray for our president, Congress and courts, and we pray that you give wisdom, humility. May they look to you for guidance. And we pray that as a result – as Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 2, we pray that you'd give peace to your people, peace to the church, and that we might flourish in these days in which we live. So we commit all of that to you.

We thank you for this time together though. It is a time of spiritual refreshment. It should be. Make it that for us, Lord. Build us up in the faith and prepare us for a time of study now as we sing our next hymn. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen

[Message] A few years ago, there was an article in the *Smithsonian* Magazine by a journalist who hiked into the steaming jungles of New Guinea to spend a few days with a tribe of cannibals. It was a risky expedition. Dutch missionaries on the border of the

tribe's territory wouldn't enter because it was so hostile. The cannibals considered outsiders to be ghost demons. Still, the journalist traveled up a winding river and he visited the tribe.

He survived, of course, but said after hearing them describe their gruesome practice, it took him a long time to get to sleep his first night. Well, I guess so. But as hair raising as a night among cannibals might have been, imagine spending the night with lions, hungry lions. That's the account of Daniel, chapter 6, the most famous chapter in the Book of Daniel, and one of the best known stories in the Bible, Daniel in the Lions' Den. Like so many incidents in this book, it is a true story of courage.

One of the greatest challenges in life is to be a minority of one, to stand alone for one's convictions. That is sometimes the challenge that we face for our faith. But we have examples to follow and to encourage us, and none better than Daniel himself. His life from its early years in chapter 1 of his book, where he stood up for the law's kosher diet, to his old age in chapter 5, where he preaches a sermon to the King of Babylon, all of them show great courage. But the greatest example of bravery is here in chapter 6.

It is the account of a man standing alone for his faith, but also one that reminds us we are never alone. The Lord is with us always. It is a new regime. Babylon has fallen; the Persian Empire has replaced it, and Darius the Mede is now king. But who was Darius?

That's a question I ask because Bible scholars have pondered it for years. His name is not mentioned outside of the Old Testament. So some assume he is a fictional character, much like they did with Belshazzar until archaeology uncovered evidence of his existence. But this is history, and Daniel presents him as a real person. One solution is identifying Darius with **Gobryas**, who was the general in Cyrus' Army and who engineered the fall of Babylon, and whom Cyrus the Great made governor of Babylon.

Many think that this is him and that Darius is an alternate name for that individual. But another solution is to explain the name,

Darius, as one of Cyrus' titles. Dual names were not uncommon in the ancient world, not uncommon in the Old Testament, not uncommon in the Book of Daniel. Daniel's Babylonian name was Belteshazzar. So he's Daniel and he's Belteshazzar, and he's referred to as both in this book.

Now, one problem with that is the last verse of the chapter, verse 28. "Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." So that seems to put a distinction between the two and refers to two different individuals. And yet, that's not really a problem because it may be intended to identify Cyrus and Darius rather than distinguish them. And in that case, it can be translated, "Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius, that is in the reign of Cyrus the Persian."

I think there is good support for that. But both are possible explanations and plausible explanations. There's no reason to doubt that Darius was a real person and the historical king. He was an efficient administrator, and he wasted no time in organizing his new government. Really, the time between chapter 5 and chapter 6 is about a year.

He appointed 120 satraps, preachers, governors over the kingdom, and he organized them under three commissioners. Daniel, amazingly, was one of the commissioners. Remember, he had basically been marginalized by Belshazzar, was somewhat in retirement and was called out in order to interpret this handwriting on the wall. But now, within a year, very soon after the conquest, Darius is very wise in organizing his kingdom, and he learned who Daniel was and appointed him. And very quickly, we learn that Daniel distinguished himself as the best of the three.

Verse 3: "Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom." Darius wanted to make him head of all the commissioners and, really, his surrogate to rule the kingdom. That's quite an amazing feat for a

man his age and in such a brief amount of time. But then remember from chapter 1 the reason for this man's success. It was the reason for the success of all four of those young Hebrews.

Back in chapter 1 in verse 17, **Daniel** wrote, "As for these four youths –" that is Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego– "God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of [a]literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams." In other words, Daniel was a very wise man. He had great understanding because God gave it to him, just as He gave power to Nebuchadnezzar and to Belshazzar, and now to Darius, alias Cyrus, whoever he may be. The King of Babylon was now in power because of God's power and God's will. And Daniel is preeminent because God had blessed him.

He'd given him much. And as a result of that – and I should add that this Daniel who had been given much and, therefore, of much was required – acted with great responsibility and diligence. This is an earnest man, a disciplined man, a very godly man, as we see in a moment. He acted upon the gifts that God gave him. And the result of that was success, great success.

He was not an idle man. He was a diligent man whom God had gifted. And yet there's a problem with success. Sometimes it provokes jealousy. And it did with the satraps and commissioners who began seeking some ground for accusing Daniel and removing him.

They didn't like the idea that this foreigner, this Jew was over them. The problem is they found nothing incriminating. However, they knew he was a man of strong spiritual convictions and realized that the only way they could bring him down would be in regard to what they call, in verse 5, "the law of his God." What a testimony. Daniel was an old man. He was well over 80.

He had been a very public figure for years and lived long enough to have been observed by a lot of people. And here, there were what? A hundred and twenty, if all of the satraps are included in

this, and then two commissioners. A hundred and twenty-two men got together to find one area, even a small flaw in his life, something that they could use against him, and they could find nothing. As verse 4 says, no evidence of corruption, none.

No irregularities in business, no moral inconsistencies, no questions as to his loyalty, honesty and integrity. The only way they could trap Daniel was in regard to his faithfulness to the Lord. Now, that is a great testimony. It should be the testimony of all of us, that the only accusation people can bring against us is that we are too spiritual, too religious, too unashamably Christian. And so that was what they used to set a trap for Daniel, his relationship with the Lord.

And they were able to unwittingly draw Darius into their scheme by means of flattery. That's always a tricky thing; that's always effective. Let me tell you something. It's effective for you and me alike, because what flattery does is it appeals to the vanity within the person. And don't think you and I don't have vanity within us. Beware of the flatterer.

They came to the king with a proposal they claimed was endorsed by all of the officials of the kingdom. So assuming that there were a lot of officials that were for this: the commissioners, the satraps, high officials and governors, lower officials. It was that no one would be allowed to pray to any god except to Darius. Now, that would say a lot because Babylon was a big empire, but Persia was even bigger. It encompassed all kinds of people with various gods and beliefs.

And what they were saying is – listen – "For one month, we want to have everyone dedicate their prayers to you, Darius. They can only pray to you and not to their gods. And that's for one month. That's all, just one month. But if they violate that law, then they're to be thrown to the lions."

Then they urged him to sign the statute, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which could not be revoked. And you remember that great statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and the top of

it, the head of it was gold. That is Nebuchadnezzar. And I think the reason for that is because Nebuchadnezzar had unlimited authority. No king existed like him.

You remember from last week when Daniel is reviewing the life of Nebuchadnezzar before Belshazzar, and he said of him, "Whoever he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive." In other words, Nebuchadnezzar was the law. What he said went. If he wanted someone put to death, he merely gave the word and it happened. If he wanted to save that person, say he wanted to reverse that decree, he could reverse it.

He was the law; he was the state. Now, this is different for the Persian king. The Persian kings were under the law. The law of the Medes and Persians was that once the law was established, not even the king could revoke it. It had to be put into effect. And so that's what they wanted. This law of praying to Darius for one month would be established by the law of the Medes and Persians and it could not be revoked.

And it's possible that Darius saw this statute as a measure that would help bind this vast empire together and unite all the disparate parts of it in allegiance to this one leader. And so perhaps he saw this in a practical way and thought that might be helpful to help establish this new empire of Persia. That's possible, but it's more likely that he simply fell under the spell of flattery. "Now they'll pray to me." What a thought.

Well, the Proverbs warn against that. "A flattering mouth works ruin." But Darius didn't see that. Now, he was a wise man, a man with worldly wisdom at least. But here, he was completely naïve, and he let himself be flattered into signing the decree, and it was evil.

Even if the decree would have had good political intentions and it had a fine motive, it was still wrong. It was the putting the king or the state in the place of God, and no child of God can worship the state or the ruler. We considered this problem a few weeks ago when Roman citizens were required by law to offer a pinch of incense to the

emperor and confess Caesar is lord. It was a loyalty test, and it was done to prove that the worshipper was a good citizen.

And you can imagine how Christians might have faced that life-or-death situation and thought, "Well, you know I want to be a good citizen and I should be a good citizen. I'm commanded to be a good citizen in Romans chapter 13. And Paul tells us in 1 Timothy chapter 2 to pray for the king and for those in authority over us. And I want to be a good citizen so I'll just do that. The Lord knows I don't worship this man as God."

But, of course, the Christians could not do that. That's rationalizing a sin. And he could not confess that any king was God or that any law of the land was above the law of the Lord. So, as a result, many of those early Christians refused to do it and they were thrown to the lions. Well, they had a predecessor in that and a model to follow in Daniel, because he was unwilling to compromise his faith in order to save his life.

The challenge here is similar to the one that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced when they refused to bow to the golden image, and they were thrown into the fiery furnace. But this is also different. There are lots of ways to sin. I don't know if anybody's ever drawn up a list of sins and all the sins that people can or could commit. It would be a changing list because there's always a new way, a new subtlety to sin.

There are all kinds of sins. But all of them really fall into one of two categories. They are either sins of commission or sins of omission. Sins of commission are things that we do but shouldn't have done. And things of omission are things that we didn't do but should have done.

And the second, the sin of omission is really the more subtle of the two. And that was Daniel's challenge. It wasn't to commit idolatry. That was the challenge that those three young Hebrews faced. Are you going to bow down and worship? And they said no.

They wouldn't engage in that sin of commission. This really, for Daniel, was a sin of omission. It was to omit worship in order to save his life. When Daniel learned of the decree he responded. In verse 10, we read that he entered his house, he went to his roof where he had a room, he opened the window toward Jerusalem and prayed.

That was his custom. He prayed kneeling, "three times a day, praying and giving thanks before God." The verse ends, notice verse 10, the end of it, "as he had been doing previously." This wasn't some show of spiritual bravado. He wasn't defying the law in order to make a point or draw attention to himself.

This wasn't some new practice that he engaged in. This was his custom. This is what he'd done for years. This is what he'd done since he was a young man; probably what he had done before he'd even been taken captive from Jerusalem. This was his practice.

Still, it would have been so easy, would it not, to have sought a faith alternative to this, to have taken a different approach, maybe lay off praying for a month. "I've prayed all my life. What's one month vacation from praying. I just won't do that," or, "No, I'll keep praying, but I'm just not going to open the window. I'm going to pray behind it. They'll never know what I'm doing," or "I'll just pray in my heart.

The Lord knows. The Lord hears. He hears that as well as He hears an audible prayer. No one could see." Well, that's true. He'd still be praying in all of those circumstances, and he would have avoided the danger.

And I would imagine that all of that occurred to him. He thought about that. But, if so, he didn't think about it very long. He certainly didn't think about it seriously, because he knew that to do that would have been a compromise. It would have been a compromise because his practice, his policy all of his life had been to pray three times toward Jerusalem. And to stop that would have been an act out of fear.

And so Daniel was a man of God. He didn't value life more than he valued the Lord, so Daniel continued being faithful. Times had changed, but Daniel hadn't. He continued doing right, even though it made him, as James Boice called it, "a minority of one." And that's a tough place to be, a minority of one, alone. And yet we never are.

Daniel knew that. He wasn't praying to an idea, he was praying to a person. He was praying to an infinite person. He was praying to the Lord who knew everything that was going on with Daniel, knew Daniel's situation better than Daniel knew it. Now, that's the value of theology.

I've stressed that before. I probably talked about that last week. I know I talked about it as we've gone through the Book of Daniel because it's such a significant part of Daniel and it's the practical application of Daniel. Strong doctrine gives people a firm foundation. It gives them a firm backbone. It gives them strength.

History gives us examples of men and women who had a deep understanding of the Lord and were willing to become a minority of one. Athanasius is one. If you've come on Wednesday nights, you're familiar with Athanasius. He's one of the great heroes of the church. He was an Egyptian.

He was the bishop of Alexandria, and he opposed one of the greatest heresies that have ever occurred in the church, and that is Arianism. It denied the deity of Christ and it became very popular. It was preached by a very popular preacher, Arias. And it took hold, and it took hold in significant places because the men of power and prestige were swept up in Arianism. But Athanasius, the great preacher of Alexandria was not, even though other preachers were.

He preached against it; he opposed it, and the result was opposition, strong opposition, hot opposition. He had to flee for his life on more than one occasion. Five times he was forced into exile over a period of 17 years. And he became known by a popular expression: "Athanasius Contra Mundum." Athanasius against the world.

That's not uncommon. Christians find themselves in similar situations. Less sensational, but still it's hostile. When we must stand alone for our faith, stand against the world, stand against the tide of the spirit of this age. Daniel was content to do that.

Daniel was content to stand alone because Daniel knew he wasn't alone, not really. The Lord was with him, and the Lord is the Lord of heaven and earth. He is the only God and He is all powerful. He knew the Lord could deliver him. He had seen it.

He had seen it with his three friends who were saved from the fiery furnace. He knew it before then. He knew his history. He knew the history of Israel from the time of Abraham when God delivered Abraham from difficult circumstances; when Israel was delivered from slavery in Egypt and delivered from the armies of Pharaoh; when God delivered the nation in the times of the judges, from the evil nations that oppressed them. And all through the times of Samuel and David, and all through their history he saw a gracious God deliver His people. He knew God and he trusted the Lord.

But he also knew that this was a real danger that he faced, and he could easily lose his life in a horrible way. The Lord's will is not always to save His people from trials and death. But His will for us is always wise. We may not understand it. But we know by faith, and we know as we read God's Word, that His ways are always good for us.

The Lord is always faithful to us and invites us to be faithful to Him. Well, Daniel was. Daniel was a loyal man, the best servant the king had. They couldn't find any treachery in his life, any infidelity in his life – his enemies couldn't. He had been the king's good friend, the king's loyal friend.

And yet, he did not put the king ahead of his loyalty to the Lord. He put that first and refused to obey a bad law. He opened his windows, he bowed toward Jerusalem in reverence to the Lord, and perhaps as an expression of faith that the Lord's promise to the Jews to return them to their homeland would happen. Maybe that's why he

was facing Jerusalem. It was a testimony to his faith and the promises of God and the faithfulness of God.

And there, kneeling in that direction, he prayed. Now, all of this, I must confess, I find very convicting. Not just Daniel's courage but his prayer life. He prayed three times a day. That took time out of a very busy schedule. This man had a tight schedule.

He was a busy man, and yet, not too busy to pray. Not once, not twice but three times a day. How's your prayer life? That's what I ask myself. That's what this impresses me with.

The chapter impresses me with a number of things, but that's certainly one of them. I have to examine myself. A man or woman of God is a person of prayer. And that was Daniel's custom. That's the kind of man he was. He prayed.

He puts the Lord and his relationship with Him above all things. We read about Enoch back in Genesis 5. Don't know much about Enoch. Jude mentions him. We learn from Jude that he's a prophet.

But what we learn from Moses in Genesis 5 is "Enoch walked with God for 300 years. He lived in an evil age, the most evil age that's ever been in the history of the world, that so disgusted the Lord God that He regretted creating man and swept it away in a flood. That man stayed faithful for 300 years in that kind of environment. And why? Because he walked with the Lord.

That's the kind of man Daniel was. A man who lived in Babylon, the capital of paganism, the metaphor for satanic power, and yet he stayed faithful and he flourished because he was a man who prayed. So how's your prayer life? How's my prayer life? That's a question we need to ask ourselves.

This was Daniel's custom. Now, Daniel's enemies knew that it was his custom. They had no doubt seen him many times on his roof, one or two or three times a day, praying. And they hatched a plot based on his faithfulness, based on his consistency. So they waited there.

They knew. "He'll come out here. About that time for him to pray. Oops, look. Take a look. Those windows are open. See. See what I told you." And there he was; he was up there praying.

So when they saw him in prayer, they went to the king. They reminded him of the decree and the punishment for violators is being thrown to the lions. And Darius acknowledge it. Yeah, the statement is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians which may not be revoked. And having said that, they then reminded him or gave him a report on Daniel.

He violated this decree. When Darius heard that, we read "he was deeply distressed." Now, at this time, he sees things a little more clearly. And now, he sees behind the law. It was to destroy Daniel.

Darius now recognizes the motives in these individuals, and it concerned him greatly. He had a genuine interest in and affection for Daniel, and with good reason. Daniel was an honest man, he was a wise man, he was a diligent worker. He was the best man he could have for his empire. And I think, along with that, Daniel was just a personable man.

We've seen that from the way he conducted himself in chapter 1. He was a man who was pleasant to be around, a man who reflected the character of the Lord God. Proverbs 15, verse 7 says, "When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." Daniel pleased the Lord and men were at peace with him. Darius was. Now, others were not.

So when you please the Lord, there's also another side of that. You'll upset others. And sometimes men are offended by righteousness. We know that. We see that all through the Gospels with our Lord, Jesus Christ.

And Daniels' life was a life like that, very similar to that, or a life in which there was no basis for accusation against him. He'd stirred up jealousy. Darius realized that. He realized that he'd been duped and he then set out to correct that. He set out to free Daniel.

He worked hard until sunset when the sentence was to be carried out. Yet, as diligently as he worked, it was useless. He was under a law. He was under the law of the Medes and the Persians which could not be revoked, could not be changed. And so the sentence was carried out.

Daniel was brought to the place of execution and he was cast into the lions' den. Before the pit was closed and sealed, Darius tried to encourage Daniel with words recorded in Verse 16. "Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you." That, I think was more of a wish than a certainty. The entrance was sealed and Darius went back to the palace where he spent a sleepless night without food, without entertainment. He couldn't eat or sleep out of concern for his friend, Daniel.

At daybreak, Darius returned back to the lions' den, and in what verse 20 describes as "a troubled voice," called out "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?" I suspect the only answer he expected back was the sound of a low growl. Instead, to his surprise, Daniel spoke, "O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime."

Who was the angel that the Lord sent? Could have been any number of angles, like the one He sent to deliver Peter from prison in Acts chapter 12. But most likely it was the same angel who was in the fire with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the Angle of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ, who's far more than an angle. So what an amazing night that was for Daniel, a night with lions and with the Son of God.

How did he spend it? Sleeping peacefully surrounded by big cats or in fellowship with the Lord. Well, we're not told, but I feel sure that he was wide awake and engaged in deep conversation with the Lord God. And if so, the night ended all too quickly. But it did.

Darius pulled him out, and in terrible retribution threw the others in. And in verse 24 we read: "The king then gave orders, and they brought those men who had maliciously accused Daniel, and they cast them, with their children and their wives into the lions' den; and they had not reached the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones." That was Persian justice, but it shows that Daniel's faith wasn't the result of toothless old lions being in the den. They were ravenous man eaters. God delivered him.

It was an obvious miracle. And then Darius, in light of that, very impressed by the deliverance of Daniel, he issued a decree. It's been described as being not a very profound decree. Well, I think it was a very profound decree. It's profound for a pagan, but it's also profound for a prophet. He wrote in all the languages and to all the peoples – that's a number of different people in the Persian Empire, "May your peace abound," and then in verses 26 and 27, is the decree.

"I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; for He is the living God and enduring forever, and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, and His dominion will be forever. He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions." That's true. God is real. He is the living God. He is the only God.

He is the eternal God. And His kingdom – not Babylon, not Persia or any other nation – His kingdom is the only one that will never end. That's the great lesson of this book, that God is absolutely sovereign. He establishes kings and he establishes His kingdom. He will do that, and it will never perish.

This Darius, who may well be Cyrus the Great, understood that, and in his decree expressed our hope that our God is God and He saves. He shuts the mouths of lions. Hebrews 11:33 speaks of those who believe in the Lord, men and women, who by faith "shut the mouths of lions," which is a clear reference to this. The meaning is

the Lord shuts the mouths of lions for believers. That's also true that He doesn't always rescue His servants.

Hebrews 11 also goes on to recount those who died, and they died cruel deaths, sawn asunder. That's the real world for Christians. It's not always escaping hardship and death. We often experience pain. We often experience sorrow.

Some serve the Lord by dying; some serve the Lord by living. But God and His way are always perfect. And He has called all of us to stand for Him wherever we are. Because in His providence, His perfect providence, He has brought us to the place where we are.

When the Babylonian Army came to Jerusalem and took the Jews into captivity, it seemed like a great catastrophe. The nation had fallen. The city would fall. The walls would be broken down. Its temple would be burned.

It seemed like a great catastrophe, but it proved to be a blessing for many. And it proved to be a blessing for the world. Through faithful men like Daniel and the three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, men like Ezekiel, who was there also in captivity, and other men and women whose names we don't know. But that remnant that was there in that dark place, they became light to that world. For the first time, pagans were exposed to the truth of God, to His promises and to the godly behavior of saints like Daniel and these others. Who knows how many people were saved in Babylon and Persia because of that? God puts His people there in that dark land and used them for the spread of the gospel.

And He does the same with you, wherever you are, wherever your calling has brought you. To the office, to school, to a neighborhood or family. Wherever you are, you're a missionary and your mission is there. And you and I, we all are to be witnesses, both in word and deed. Even Daniel's enemies had to confess that they could find no accusation against him or evidence of corruption in him.

That didn't stop them from seeking his harm. A life lived to please God can provoke jealousy and hostility. Men love the darkness

rather than the light. They tried to crush it and snuff it out. And they may do that in a variety of ways.

Sometimes it's violently. But other times, it's a more subtle form of attack, a more subtle form of death. It's that of gossip and slander. And that can be a real trial. But it is also a test and it's an opportunity to be a witness for Christ, when we have to stand alone for our faith and our convictions, just as Daniel did, and endure that kind of thing, that kind of attack.

Daniel not only faced lions, he faced cannibals. The words that are used in verse 24 to describe the treachery of these men against Daniel is, "They maliciously accused him." Well, that literally means – and if you have a New American Standard Bible, you see this in the margin of your text. It literally means "eaten the pieces of" Daniel. The same expression was used back in chapter 3 in verse 8, of the Chaldeans who accused the three Hebrews.

People can act like cannibals and actually try to destroy, to consume, to eat up their competitors. And sometimes those competitors are Christians. They can do the same for Christians. It can happen at the office where there are jealousies and rivalries, and where people scheme to get other people's jobs. But the lesson here is one we see all through the book, and that is when we stand alone, we're never alone. In the fiery furnace or in the lions' den, the Lord is with us.

And He can shut the mouths of lions, and He can shut the mouths of gossips and slanderers. And even though our witness may not go seen or appreciated by many, nevertheless through our witness of patience and a life without corruption, and through the words of goodness that we speak about through the gospel, He can win some of those opponents to the faith and some who are simply observing us from the outside, win them and draw them to Himself. God can use a bad situation for good. And He delivers; He will.

And some are seeing more to this episode than that. They have seen this as an illustration of God delivering Israel from the great

tribulation in the last days, and that may be. This may be a kind of prophecy in that sense. He will do that, I know. And yet, certainly this is an example of how He can deliver us from every trial.

He doesn't ignore us. He is with us always, and He's always faithful. So we are to be faithful; we're to trust Him. That's our responsibility. Trust the Lord, to be faithful today and leave tomorrow to Him. Leave the outcome to Him.

He can shut the mouths of lions. He can rescue from the one Peter says, "roams the earth like a roaring lion," the devil himself. He delivers all who believe in His Son, delivers them from Satan's power. So if you're here without Christ, come to Him. You are in the power of the evil one if you're outside of Christ. Be delivered from that.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He will receive you, forgive you, wash your soul clean and make you a child of God at the moment of faith. And may we all rejoice in Christ and rest in Him. May we be faithful. That's what the world needs to see, men and women who rest in Christ.

We're citizens of the kingdom that will never pass away. This world in which we live, it is passing away. We're citizens of a kingdom that's eternal. We're to rejoice in that and be encouraged to be faithful. May God help us to do that. Let's bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank you for this great text of Scripture, a passage that is so familiar to us all. Many of us learned it when we were children. And it's a story that certainly appeals to every child. But it appeals to every adult, and it is to be understood at very deep levels that this is a great example of how you are to be able to deliver your people. You can shut the mouths of lions, hungry wild animals, and tame them for your purpose.

Father, we're in your hand and you give us every breath of life that we have. And so rest in you. Help us to rest in you. Give us your strength to do that. And those who are here who may not know Christ, give them a sense of the danger they are in and draw them to yourself. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

- 20 -

"A Night With Lions" by Dan Duncan

Copyright © 2014 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.