

## CHRISTIANITY IN A POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN<sup>1</sup>

- I. WHY DANIEL?**—How does a believer in the One True God live in a pluralistic, secular society? We find ourselves in this position and we find that ultimately, God has brought us here. What schools should we attend, where should we work and what should we do, should we be offensive and aggressive or inoffensive and docile, should we protest in the streets or pray quietly in our closets at home? Throughout the book, Daniel is a wise man who takes on two names, a brave man who goes into difficult places engaging them yet remaining distinct, an uncompromising man who is hated by some and loved by others, and a suffering man who goes into the den of lions representing his people. Already, Daniel is pointing to Jesus, the man who took on two names (God and man), the brave man who left all power and glory behind to come to the difficult places engaging people but clearly distinct, the non-compromiser who is hated by the authorities and loved by His disciples, and the sufferer who goes into the real lion's den. Read Daniel 6.1-10, 16-23. Tim Keller points out that Daniel teaches us 3 things that reflect what Jesus Himself taught in Matthew 5.10-16: We must be Salt, Hurt, and Light.
- II. SALT**—Warns against separation. Notice that Daniel, like Joseph before him has excelled in a pagan society. 1. He is incorruptible in a very corrupt organization (v. 4). 2. He was a hard worker, faithful in all he did (v. 3-4). 3. He was extremely effective in the bureaucracy b/c the king “suffered no loss (v. 2)” and he “planned to set him over the whole kingdom (v. 3).” Remember Jeremiah 29—Daniel is not separating, not leaving and hating the city but working for the prosperity, the shalom of the city. He is engaged in the city but everyone knows what he stands for—in fact the other satraps quickly discover that the only way they can trip him up is by the “law of his God (v. 5).”
- A. **SALT IS POURED OUT**—It does not remain huddled in a jar. Salt goes out and it gets into everything or else it will be ineffective. This is what Jesus does—he touches everyone, the outcast, the marginal, the powerful. There is no area left untouched by Him.
- B. **SALT PRESERVES**—Not as much for flavor in ancient days. They had no refrigeration so they had to salt things down to preserve them from decay or rotting. Salt goes onto things that would otherwise fall apart, be destroyed, or lost. Christians are to go places that would fall apart without us. Remember the image in the king's dream from chapter 2? It was beautiful, powerful, and dazzling but it had clay feet and eventually it crumbled. Our culture/kingdom is like this too, very attractive but also having clay feet and crumbling. Why? Neb was out to make a name for Himself, just like in the Tower of Babel. Keller: Without God people are self-namers. Just like Neb they are seeking an identity, a calling, a name (go out and find yourself). Cultures crumble b/c they fill with people who are staking their entire identities on how high they can go, what they can achieve, who they can impress. If we base our identity and our life here, we will crumble. We will have ulcers and anxiety over our jobs, we will experience stress, we will not handle failure, etc. But as Xians, we already have a name! We don't have to name ourselves b/c God has already named us. We move into the world with the confidence and security that we have a God-given identity. We don't have to burn out or do it all, don't have to prove ourselves, don't have to live in embarrassment b/c we already have our name. Everyone around us will be frantically seeking a name but we already have ours. We can then live for justice, peace, and compassion—we can focus outward b/c we are inwardly secure. Work: What work should we do? Daniel had secular job, not a prophet—every job can be a calling. Where should we go? Where things are falling apart, not the comfortable, easy places (Two Nations). What if Jesus had taken this approach? Don't separate, go out and engage.

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the material for this class comes from Tim Keller's sermon series on Daniel. See [www.redeemer.com](http://www.redeemer.com) for more info

- III. HURT**—But don't assimilate either. For most of us, this one will probably be our biggest struggle. Most of us are out there like salt but not having much of a preserving influence and it's b/c we don't see how Jesus calls us to be hurt (Matt. 5). We can be out there in the right places but be so inoffensive, so inauspicious, so innocuous, so nice, that nobody even knows we are Xians. But Daniel shows us and Jesus shows us that we need to expect hostility, anger, misunderstanding, and persecution (blessed). Daniel knows this instinctively. He is not surprised. He is known for his faith and he goes and prays with the windows open again. When he is brought before the king, he does not raise a defense, call on the Christian justice league, or stage a debate. He submits himself to be hurt in the lion's den. What happens with Daniel? He is about to get the big promotion in v. 3, so the satraps try to trap him. They first try to get the goods on Daniel, assuming he is inept, corrupt, and cheating like them (v. 4). But he is not like them. If you are a Xian, you must realize that there is something about you that is simply different, that must and will always be strange to outsiders. The world cannot understand the Gospel or they wouldn't be the world. Why are we as Xians always putting so much pressure on the world to understand us and live like us? We get so bent out of shape; we rant and rave, we hold protests of anger, and write books on persecution. It is true that persecution may be coming to Christians in America, but hurt is to be expected. We need to spend time equipping each other and our children to be people of the cross, people who win through losing. This is why Daniel turns his heart 3x a day to God—that is how we endure suffering. There will always be reasons that the world will see us as arrogant. Here's the question for us—Where does the world hate you right now? If there is nowhere that the world is misunderstanding you, laughing at you, deriding you, or talking behind your back then you are probably being a coward. But if you are only getting that, all hate and no love, then you do not understand that we are called to hurt. Stop getting so riled up; have the maturity to understand non-Xians misunderstanding and love them. Daniel knows this—he is engaged but everyone knows he is distinct and many hate him for it—he does not complain.
- IV. LIGHT**—Famous story—what is moral of story? Trust in God and he will keep you from all harm. Many of us are weak Xians or not Xians at all b/c of morals like this. Either we just don't trust God enough or this just doesn't work. But this can't be the meaning—there was someone who trusted God more than Daniel, who was more perfect than Daniel and yet he was put in a cave; he had a stone rolled over him, and he was utterly destroyed. He suffered beyond compare. 'Lions' in Scripture (Psalm 10.9, 17.2, 57.4, 58.6; Prov. 28.15; Is. 5.29, 30.6; Jer. 50.17; Nahum 2.13; Rev. 17). Lions are suffering, persecution, enemies, violence and oppression, injustice and opposition. God's people were and are always surrounded (**Daniel 7.4**). Daniel represents all of Israel, captured like prey and ready to be devoured. He is one man who enters the pit for the whole nation and returns alive—there is hope, there is a return from exile coming, and there is One coming who will truly enter the lion's den and return unscathed. Why this miracle then? Miracles not just big power. But the miracles point us to salvation—they don't suspend natural order but restore it. Show us the future of Isaiah 11.6. Show us that we may suffer now, experience hurt now, but a time is coming when we will pet the lions of suffering, despair, and persecution. Notice what happens to Daniel in 6.22—God sent His angel, just like in the fiery furnace. Why not do a real miracle and obliterate? This person is Jesus and He always goes in. God does not deliver outside the furnace or outside the lion's den. Jesus went into the real den, had the real stone rolled over him, was Himself devoured by the real lions (Ps. 22.13). We will never be destroyed like that, never suffer like that, never be punished like that. There are plenty of lion's dens for us to enter in life, and we can only enter them if we really know that Jesus went into the ultimate lion's den on our behalf. Then, we won't worry about what everybody else thinks; we won't stress about our successes and failures b/c we have already been named by God, marked by Him as one for whom He would throw His Son to the lions. This is how we move into the world like salt and light. Daniel hated by satraps but loved by Darius (6.19-20). To some he is stinging salt and to others he is glorious light. Most of us have nobody mad at us and nobody attracted. Unless, we peer into the ultimate lion's den and are awestruck by Jesus there, we will never be able to live like Daniel.