

Roots
Daniel and the Scary Sleepover

Good morning. If you weren't here at the start of service a reminder that we want to be the light of Christ at Christmas time.

Last week, we collected 160 Operation Christmas Child shoe boxes at ZPC, plus Christy Tharp distributed 54 boxes to the FCA club at ZMS.

These are represented by the lights above. Each week we'll have an advent reading on light, and highlighting more ministries you are doing here to be a light in the world.

As you saw in the video, today we are learning from Daniel in the Lions' Den. Let's read it now. This is God's Word. Daniel 6:1-23:

"1 It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, 2 with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. 3 Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. 4 At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. 5 Finally these men said, 'We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.'"

6 So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: "May King Darius live forever! 7 The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den. 8 Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." 9 So King Darius put the decree in writing.

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. 11 Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. 12 So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions' den?"

The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

13 Then they said to the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.” 14 When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

15 Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, “Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.”

16 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.

19 At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. 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?”

21 Daniel answered, “May the king live forever! 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.”

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.”

Let’s pray.

This is one of those famous passages in the Old Testament which fits well in a kid’s Bible.

How God rescues the man who follows him: Daniel. Lions are scary – and Daniel is a good guy. The story is dramatic – it’s worth studying.

But if we do a character study of the main characters – it looks a little like a reality show or a show of what we think might go on in the nation’s capital – the capital of Persia that is.

Let’s look at three main characters:

Darius, the king.
The royal governors – under Darius.
And our hero Daniel.

Today there are notes in the bulletin and here on the screen.

Character on the inside is seen on the outside

King Darius
 Ultimate authority
 Agrees to be prayed to
 Loves Daniel

So let's look at Darius first.

He is the current king, the ultimate authority.
He is tricked by his governors – into a decree which he signs, that says for 30 days that anyone who prays to another god or man, anyone but Darius, must be thrown into the lions' den.

So he is the kind of man, in that place and time who agrees to receive prayer and praise.

But his character is not all bad.

He has noticed that Daniel is the best and most honorable of all the royal governors or minister and Darius planned to make him the prime minister and set him over the whole kingdom.

Then later we see how much he loves Daniel. When Daniel is thrown into the lions' den, the king agonizes over it.

In this Persian culture, once the king made a decree it couldn't be changed. A new decree could be made, but the old decree must be followed. So even though Darius felt awful that Daniel would be given to the lions, he followed the law.

How did he feel about Daniel? He said to Daniel: May your God rescue you!

Darius couldn't eat and sleep that night. Early the next morning, he hurried to the lions' den. He must have loved Daniel – and seen the injustice, because kings don't usually hurry or check so closely on their governors or advisers.

The king was overjoyed when Daniel was saved.

The king is a worldly king, but does certainly know character when he sees it.

He is so glad that Daniel is saved. We'll hear more from Darius in a few minutes.

What about these guys? The royal governors, ministers, or advisers.

Royal Governors

Jealous

Dishonest

Devious

They are jealous. They don't want Daniel to be over them, and schemed how to stop him. They are jealous of others, especially this man foreigner, who is getting promoted. They willing to get that person, and stop him.

They are dishonest to the king. They say that the governors and advisers "have ALL agreed" to issue this decree. Well I'm sure Daniel didn't agree – in fact he wasn't advised at all. We see that he hears about it later, after it's already been done.

They are devious – plotting scheming, lying to get their way. Willing to sacrifice someone else they are jealous of to get ahead.

Have you ever felt that you worked with someone like that?

Which brings us to Daniel.

Daniel

Trustworthy; neither corrupt nor negligent

Disciplined

Faithful and humble

Let's read again vss. 3-5.

"Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. 4 At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. 5 Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

Daniel had:

exceptional qualities

no grounds for chargers

no corruption

no negligence

no basis for any charge – unless it has to do
with the law of his God – amazing!

Think about that, it says so much about his character.

For Daniel, the other guys could find no corruption. He was trustworthy.

I used to imagine Daniel a strapping young guy thrown into the lions' den. Earlier in the book of Daniel, in chapter one, a previous king had brought in young men into his court who were: Daniel 1:4-5- "...young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.[b] 5

Daniel continues to show that he is an honorable guy over his life, up until this story today.

Now I think of him as still a young guy, as in the first part of this book; but commentaries I read last week, say he was over 80 years old at the time of being thrown to the lions! He's in the twilight of his career and life.

When I read this, I thought of one of my modern heroes, Billy Graham. I love Billy Graham. In fact that's where we got our son's name, Graham. No pressure Graham! Our 3 other kids all have names of Bible character or a missionary – Luke, Jacob, and Lexia – so no pressure on them either!

But I love Billy Graham even though he is now at 96 years old and in the twilight of his life.

Ok, I came pretty close to hero worship in summer of 1999 when Billy Graham did a crusade here in Indy and I got to help with a planning committee for one of the nights of the crusade – I was so excited!

I kept talking up Billy Graham to a close friend – who finally said, "Scott, he's just a man." "no, no – he's much more than that – he's Billy Graham!" I mean, he's shared the gospel with more people than any other person who ever walked the earth – that can be documented. For a guy who loves history, he has prayed with or advised every president since Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower – how cool is that!

But...here's a couple of great stories about Billy that show he is just a man.

While just a young man in 1949 – he doubted his faith. Yes, really. A very intelligent friend of his, Charles Templeton, rejected the Bible and said it couldn't be trusted. He made fun of Graham for preaching the truth of the Bible. Billy doubted. He spent time at a camp called Forest Home, actually going into the woods praying to God about the questions and doubts he had.

The story is told fell to his knees and the Holy Spirit moved in him as he said, "Father, I am going to accept this as Thy Word—by faith! I'm going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be Your inspired Word!"

Like Daniel, he fell to his knees and prayed. He obeyed God, despite doubts in himself and even some questions he had, he had faith.

Just weeks later he had a long crusade in Los Angeles where thousands came to faith in Jesus Christ and his crusade ministry took off.

Now, fast forward to recent times.

Not that many years ago, Billy was asked by a reporter, what he thought he would hear when he met God in heaven, he said humbly, “I would like to hear, well done good and faithful servant, but I don’t think I will.” He knew he was an imperfect sinner like everyone else – and Billy Graham is just a man.

Now I didn’t like to hear it, but I accepted that one of my heroes is just a man - with flaws, limitations, at one time doubts, and gifts he used for God. I also like him more because of his character.

What about Daniel?

He seems humble, praying 3 times daily. But he’s just a man. He can’t change the law, he doesn’t try to change it or talk his way out. He still honors the king.

Commentator Walter Luthi tells us about Daniel:

“Here in the palace where Daniel has already climbed so high, where he can climb no higher, a miracle happens: He remains what he is.” He is a child of God, not the Persian or Babylonian gods, but his God. “While serving the king, he remains a subject of the king of kings, before whom he bows his knee,” three times a day.

So we remain who we are – we continue to do what we do.
We use our ordinary gifts, abilities, jobs – to glorify God.

I thought about what we’ve learned at ZPC the last couple of weeks.

Daniel is an older, respected man, who prays to God on his knees.
David was a young boy – not respected, but confident in God.

David though used 5 smooth stones to slay Goliath.
He used ordinary stones to show that God was extraordinary.
David was who he was – a good shepherd who knew how to use a slingshot and who really trusted and believed God would save him.

With Daniel – we just see him being who he is – just faithful to God again and again. He prays continually, and does what is asked without corruption or neglect and does it well.

Billy Graham was doing what God called him to do – with the gifts he had – not without doubts at times – and with humility.

You don't have to be David, or Daniel – or Billy Graham! You don't have to be famous like the Bible characters or famous in the world! You don't have to be a hero!

Young or old – your age doesn't hold you back from being a light for God.
You remain who you are, remain faithful to him as Daniel did – then serve him where you are called. Now I know I'm pretty ordinary. God can use me too.

How is God using you – just as you are? To make a stand, to be a light, using the ordinary to give praise to the extraordinary God?

Two weeks ago, we took smooth stones from worship, and wrote on them the ordinary things that God can use to show that God is extraordinary.

Let's see some of the rocks you wrote on – how you might be used by God!

My rock said “listen and speak.”

I try to listen well – don't always do it - but try to listen first; then speak later when I have something to say.
It's ordinary but is what I can do for God.

SO God can use David, God can use Daniel, God can use me, God can use you.

How does the drama end?

Darius is willing to change
Governors are judged
Daniel is rescued; he is a light in the darkness
God is praised – Daniel 6:26-27

What happens in this drama!?!

Darius in his love for Daniel – hurries to the den.
Daniel is saved, rescued by God! Look again at what they both say:

Darius says, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?”

21 Daniel answered, “May the king live forever! 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.”

Daniel is rescued by God – Darius realizes the other governors were manipulating the law and him to attack Daniel.

The governors get the consequences of their actions – thrown into the lions’ den.

Daniel – in a culture where his God was not known very well – is now known.
Daniel was faithful, prayerful, and used who he was to serve God.
God gets the credit and the praise.

What does Darius do – read the final verses of this chapter, Daniel 6:26-27:

26 “I issue a decree (public proclamation) that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

“For he is the living God
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.”

Darius says this about Daniel’s God:

God is alive, God is eternal, and God saves.

Pretty good for a guy who did not know God before!

Daniel has been a light in the darkness.
And God is praised and realized that he is truly God!

We too want to do that today in our broken world.

You are doing that through your ministry.

We don’t want anything we do to be an honor to ourselves but to God.

The last few weeks, you filled 160 shoeboxes, plus 54 more through a ZPC member at a local school.

These boxes don’t just have toys, crayons, t-shirts and maybe some hard candy. They had to be done by November to be shipped to a central location. There each box is filled with a gospel message in the child’s language where he or she will read about the love of Jesus. You are being a light in the dark by filling a shoe box! Using the ordinary to proclaim the extraordinary grace of Jesus Christ!

By the way, the boxes go to Samaritan's Purse – an international Christian aid organization founded and run by Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham.

Also, these lights above, we light today to show how you are being the light of Christ in the world!

As David did, use the ordinary.

As Daniel did, be who you are - remain faithful to God – and be a light.

Let's do that this Christmas season.

Let's pray.

Benediction.

Be who God made you to be – both young and old.

Remain faithful to God and be a light in the world.