

60 years before our lesson from the book of Daniel, Daniel had been ripped from his home and his homeland in Israel and carted off by the Babylonians. Exiling the brightest and best from their home country and plugging them into government jobs was a way to keep them from stirring up trouble and organizing a revolt back home.

Daniel is now more than 80 years old. During his long career in the government, he distinguished himself by his faithful and dedicated service.

Regardless of what work we do, our service should model Daniel's. We always want to do our best no matter the situation. We always want to serve God by serving others. Even Jesus asks us to reflect favorably on him not only by what we say, but also by what we do.

Daniel's honesty and integrity were noticed by his king and his co-workers. His king appreciated it. His co-workers didn't. They were jealous and upset when this foreigner got promoted instead of them.

So, they got to thinking. What could they do to take this guy down? There was nothing they could pin on the guy. His performance on the job was flawless. He was such a religious guy that he refused to be corrupted. He'd never do anything against ... wait a minute ... that's it. They'll attack his faith and his God!

What a compliment for Daniel! His enemies would have to create a situation where his loyalty to his God would cause some kind of conflict with the laws of the land.

Thankfully, we don't have to choose between obeying our God and our government. But if that time would ever come for us, we can trust God to show us the way just like he showed Daniel.

Those plotting against Daniel proposed that King Darius ... by royal decree ... make it illegal to pray to anyone other than the king himself over the next 30 days. Those who did would be condemned to

death in the lion's den. For 30 days, every prayer must be channeled through the king. The king's huge ego was all in at the idea.

Daniel was well aware of his rivals, their jealousy and how closely they watched him. He knew who was responsible for this new law. He's facing a life-changing decision: *"Should I give up and give in to their plot? Should I risk losing my life and my position in the gov't? If I'm mangled by the lions, I can't help the Jewish exiles anymore."*

What choices did he actually have? Pray to God through Darius? Unthinkable! Stop praying for a month? Unthinkable! Pray in some other room of the house instead of in front of an open window? Here's what he did: **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.** His loyalty to God had been lived out in the open. For him to stop or change would be the same as disowning his God. That too was unthinkable!

At this difficult moment in his life, Daniel's prayer actually included his thankfulness for this situation in his life. Daniel also asks God to strengthen him to face whatever lay ahead, so that he wouldn't buckle under the pressure.

Is prayer our first instinct and response to difficulties in life, or is it our last resort after "we've" exhausted every other alternative?

Daniel's enemies - by having the king sign this 30-day law, spying on Daniel's prayer life and making the king enforce his 30-day law - had accomplished their goal! Daniel had an appointment with lions. He was a dead man walking. Nobody ever lived through the night.

When the king realized the fall-out from his royal decree, he was sick to his stomach. There was nothing he could do. He could only hope for the

best: **“May your God, whom you serve, rescue you!”**

At the palace Darius couldn't eat or sleep all night. Do you think it was a different story for Daniel? Do you picture Daniel being lowered into the den of lions and, as he is maybe hears God say: *“I've got this covered. You'll be OK. Let me introduce you to the angel that's going to keep you company tonight.”*

At the crack of dawn, Darius hustles back to the lion's den. He opens the cave and calls out to Daniel, hoping somehow, someway that Daniel's God had saved him. He's shocked to hear Daniel's voice: **“May the king live forever! 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.”**

These are not the last words of a dying man mauled by wild animals. These are the words of a man who was not only alive, but untouched by the lions. A man who knew that he had witnessed a miracle. His God, the only true God; and our God, the God who has given us his written Word, had sent this angel to the rescue.

Why hadn't the hungry lions touched Daniel? **“Because he had trusted in his God.”** That doesn't mean that when we aren't “rescued” from whatever lion's den we find our ourselves, it's because we don't trust God, or trust him enough.

Daniel trusted that God could deliver him, but even if God allowed him to be eaten by the lions, he still had the assurance that he would rise again from the dead. Daniel had faith his Savior would come and save him from his sins. Whether God saved him from immediate death by the lions now, or took him from this world through death by the lions, it didn't matter. Daniel wins.

At times, it may seem like the devil, who is described as a roaring lion in the Bible, is going to devour us, too. Satan had his time when he struck Jesus' heel on the cross. But now Satan's power is crushed, stomped on by the King of kings. Jesus

died with our sins on his shoulders and left those sins behind in his grave. Jesus promises us salvation by faith in him. Just like Daniel, our strength comes from our faith in God.

Surrounded all night by lions, Daniel remembered the promise of Psalm 91: **“No harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels, concerning you to guard you in all your ways.”** Daniel may not have seen God's angel, but he knew God sent one to rescue him.

Daniel slept through the night because he knew God was there with him. We can sleep through the night knowing God is right there with us. We never have to be afraid to lean on God, or stand up for God.

The king couldn't believe his ears when he heard Daniel's voice. Once they lifted Daniel up and out of the lion's den, he couldn't believe his eyes either. Not even a scratch. All because of the angel.

We can't close today without saying a few things about angels. The Bible teaches us that angels are invisible creatures created by God to be his messengers. Their purpose is to praise God and protect God's people – like you! Angels never take a sick day or a vacation. They're first responders, standing ready at any hour of any day. Angels aren't soft little cherubs who float on clouds. They are God's secret agents, his powerful warriors. In fact, one angel took out 185,000 enemy soldiers in a single night in a battle for King Hezekiah in the book of 2 Kings. They're not someone you want to mess with. The angel's job description in today's lesson was to shut the mouths of the lions – all night long – and keep Daniel safe.

You can see why kids love this story. Kids of all ages love this story. It has everything - danger, adventure, suspense and a neat ending.