

Pako Morning Service 20/11/2016

Reading(s) Daniel 6; Message: "God preservation of a faithful servant"

Congregation, today we come to perhaps one of the best known stories of the Bible, "Daniel in the Lion's den." I dare say that most children have heard this story. So the question we deal with this morning is what can we learn from this chapter and then how does God use this chapter to point us to Christ? Well, Daniel is an exilic prophet and God's people are still in exile in Babylon, but it is drawing to a close. We read in Ch 5:31 that Darius the Mede has come to power after defeating the Babylonians and he is 62 years old.

Now I don't need to say too much about the story for it is so well known. The King appoints 120 satraps, governors if you will, over a particular province, and over them three presidents, or whom Daniel was one. However, Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps, because we read, "an excellent spirit was in him" for the king was about to appoint him second in charge.

Well, it doesn't take long before jealousy starts to fester and satraps and remaining presidents try to find something against Daniel so that the King will not be able to elevate him over the whole kingdom. But note what it says there in v 4b, "...they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful and no error or fault was found in him." Note for emphasis the text mentions twice that 'no fault' was found in him.

So these 120 satraps and remaining presidents knew Daniel was totally committed to serving and praying to His God. These guys knew that Daniel prayed to his God three times day. They knew he went upstairs as he usually did to pray towards Jerusalem.

So they devise an evil scheme that Daniel can only pray to the king, and not to his own God. And sadly, unsuspecting King Darius, perhaps because of his own pride, did not see the evil of the scheme until it was too late. The satraps and remaining presidents deceitfully make the king sign this new law that no one could supposedly break. For a whole month, no one was to pray to their god or to a man. They could only pray to the king.

Ironically, this new law would not prove to be Daniel's undoing, but their own. Yes, Daniel was thrown into the Lion's den as the new decree stated. But as Daniel states, God closed the mouths of the lions and no wound was found on him because he was found blameless before God and before the King had done no harm. However, for the perpetrators of this new law, their end was sure. They and their families were thrown into the lion's den and their bones were crushed.

It sounds exceedingly cruel that these men and their wives and children were all thrown into the Lion's den. Well, perhaps that was part of the federal headship of man which was the rule for so much of OT life. Adam sinned and so does the rest of man. Koram, Dathan and Abiram and their families perished when they became insolent and rose up against Moses. And likewise here.

However, King Darius is so overjoyed that Daniel is spared that he issues a new decree stating that the people everywhere were to worship Daniel's God. So what do we do with this fascinating chapter. Well, let's learn from Daniel.

First, Daniel learned how to live as a pilgrim in a foreign land. He didn't isolate himself. Daniel was in his culture but not of his culture. He didn't withdraw from the culture as far as he could in order to avoid being stained by it. On the contrary, he had now served the empire faithfully for about seventy years. And as far as working for the King, humanly speaking, he was faultless. In fact, he served so well that he kept being promoted.

More than that, even while Daniel served the Babylonian and Persian empires well, he was not shaped by their values. Graft and corruption were widespread in the ancient world, as they are in much of the modern world. Yet, Daniel's life was so completely free from corruption and negligence that his enemies could find nothing to use against him, even when they searched diligently for it.

Note Daniel's own reason not being harmed is because he was not guilty in God's eyes. "The lions have not hurt me because I was found innocent in God's sight. Nor have I done anything wrong before you O King." (v22) What an incredible testimonial from the enemies of Daniel and of his God! He embodied the words of Jesus, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Mat 5:16). May that be true of us, more and more!

We could encourage each other to be like Daniel in the work place. What a great witness to our fellow workers and to our employees that we seek to do our best for those over us and who pay our wages. Indeed, dare to be a Daniel in this regard.

Second, even when Darius's pride was tickled by the thought that all of his officials wanted to introduce this new law as a law of the Medes and Persians which could not be changed, Daniel kept praying (6:8-9). Daniel was persistent in prayer. Again, what a great example to us today, when life is so busy, we struggle to find time to pray! Daniel's enemies were totally confident that he would rather die than disobey his God. They knew that he would sooner go to the lions than give up his practice of daily prayer.

Daniel could have responded by rushing before the king to protest the unfairness of the new law or gone home in tears to complain to his friends about it. But he didn't. He continued to do exactly what he had always done. Three times a day, as was his habit, he would go to his upper room to pray, bowing down with his face towards Jerusalem, giving thanks, petitioning and imploring his God.

There was no biblical command that required Daniel to seek God in this way, but he had made a habit of doing so. As a result, what is remarkable in his behavior is not so much that the crisis drove him to his knees, but rather that it didn't break his regular routine of prayer. Nor did Daniel immediately cry out to God for deliverance from this unjust edict. Rather, he began by giving thanks, just like normal. Isn't that remarkable?

As he faced imminent death, knowing that his enemies would certainly see him and use his prayers against him, Daniel was on his knees, giving thanks to God. He wasn't complaining to God about the new law. He was giving thanks and praying that God's people would soon be able to return to the Promised Land (Ch 9). What a great way to start in prayer, by giving thanks, for when we do so, we tune our hearts to remember God's past faithfulness to us, which will render us better able to trust his wisdom and power to answer our petitions for the future.

Third, perhaps Daniel thought his prayers weren't answered when he was thrown into the Lion's den. God could have closed the eyes of his enemies as easily as he later closed the mouths of the lions, so that Daniel could have prayed unhindered. God could have spared Daniel from the whole ordeal, but his purpose was not to save Daniel from trials but to save Daniel through trials. Just as was earlier the case with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, there were lessons that Daniel and those around him would learn, that could be learned only by Daniel going into the den of lions.

Furthermore, even Darius last words to Daniel pointed to a higher source of help, "May your God whom you serve continually, rescue you!" Likewise, God is not committed to our comfort. He is not committed to making our path through life smooth. He is committed to sanctifying us and demonstrating his own glory in and through us. Sometimes, we may cop unfair criticism from work colleagues, or be ostracized at school or in the work place for our Christian values. Perhaps our right and proper behaviour is restraining sin and corruption around us and people don't like that. But remain committed to serving the Lord.

And yes, on occasions, that commitment may mean that the Lord will subject our earthly tents, our bodies if you will, to pressures that would certainly shatter us, were his grace not sufficient for us. Thankfully, we know that he remains with us to the close of the age.

Finally, let us spend a few moments on the ultimate hero of this story. First, we see God's blessing and faithfulness to Daniel in his preservation of Daniel. We read in v3 that a 'good Spirit' was in Daniel. Obviously

God's Holy Spirit was in Daniel who enabled him to do well and to be righteous in all that he did. We already see that in Chapter 1:17, where it is also recorded that God gave Daniel's three friends special gifts, and that Daniel had the gift of interpreting dreams and visions.

Second, Daniel is spared from the lion's mouths. Darius couldn't sleep while Daniel was in the lion's den, but it seems that Daniel probably slept OK. Daniel's fearsome night in the lion's den turned out to be a delightful night with angels protecting him, why wouldn't he sleep!

And then thirdly, the story ends with Darius issuing a counter decree nullifying his original edict. In this decree he commanded fear and reverence for the God of Daniel, the living God who rescues and saves (Dan. 6:26-27). The Lord had once again brought the ruler of the mightiest of empires to acknowledge his greatness and power, as well as the fact that his kingdom would truly last forever.

And then let's not forget v28; Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and Cyrus the Persian. Daniel lived through seventy years of exile. God demonstrated that he could keep his people safe in the midst of their enemies. Life in exile would never be easy, nor would it ever be home. However, through God's faithfulness, it was possible for his people to survive the exile as strangers and aliens, serving the earthly empire in which they found themselves.

This is also how Daniel 6 addresses us, for we too are strangers and aliens in this world. The society and world in which we live is becoming an increasingly hostile place, especially towards Christians. This world is not our home and never will be. Of course, on the one hand we recognize that the enmity of the world can never hurt us beyond what the Lord permits. The Lord holds even our oppressors in his hand, and says, "So far and no further."

But on the other hand, Daniel 6 and deliverance from the lion's den is not what we always experience. There have been hundreds of nameless martyrs whom God did not deliver. There are believers who are still suffering terribly around the world today. And it's not because they are any less faithful to God than Daniel was. In some ways Daniel 6 is a foreshadowing of the verdict that will be delivered on all believers on the final judgment day. However, the unbelievers who plotted against Daniel were found guilty and crushed by God's judgment.

This then also points us to another man. Like Daniel, He was falsely accused by his enemies and brought before a ruler, Pontius Pilate, who sought unsuccessfully to deliver him from his fate, before handing him over to a violent death. Like Daniel, this Man was condemned to die. In fact, His trial went even deeper than Daniel's, for He did not merely suffer the threat of death, he went down into death itself. Although innocent, He suffered the fate of the guilty ones.

There was no angel to comfort him with the presence of God as he hung on the cross. He was left in the blackness utterly alone and abandoned by God, suffering the fate that we, the guilty ones, deserved. But because this Man, Jesus died for our sins and not his own, death had no ultimate power over him, and God raised him from the dead, precisely because the heavenly tribunal found him not guilty.

When Daniel came forth from the lions' den, he came out alone. But when Jesus rose from the dead, he came out as the first fruit of a countless number of people who have been redeemed from the pit through his death and resurrection by faith. Whoever believes in Jesus' completed work will receive the same verdict from the heavenly court as he did, "Not guilty! You may go free!"

Thankfully, the people that Jesus' redeemed through his death and resurrection are not all super believers like Daniel. Most of us are ordinary people, sinners who cave in constantly to the unrighteous demands of the empire. Thankfully, our salvation does not rest on our ability to "Dare to be a Daniel," but solely on Christ's perfect obedience in our place. In the midst of a world of trials and tribulation, that is where my peace and comfort rest and in Christ is the reason for my worship. And in the world to come, that will be all of my glory, the righteousness of Christ, given to me. May it be yours as well. Amen.