

How to Tame Lions

by Denis Lyle

The sermon teaches that faith and trust in God's ability are essential in facing challenges and overcoming obstacles.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 2:30, Psalm 34:7, Psalm 48:14, Daniel 6:23, Acts 5:29, Hebrews 11:33, 1 John 2:17

Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "Godly Perseverance"

Description

Denis Lyle preaches on 'How to Tame Lions' by drawing parallels between the imprisonment of John Bunyan and the biblical story of Daniel in the lions' den. He emphasizes the importance of unwavering faith, loyalty to God's principles, and the ability of God to deliver His faithful followers from any crisis, just like He did for Daniel. Lyle challenges the audience to prioritize prayer, integrity, and obedience to God, even in the face of opposition and potential danger.

Transcript

Daniel 6: 1-28 HOW TO TAME LIONS During the course of his life, the author of Pilgrims Progress, John Bunyan, was imprisoned under Charles 11. If Bunyan had been willing to sign a statement that he would not preach in public, he would have been released from prison. He was incarcerated for twelve years, but he could have been freed any day if he had agreed to the terms. During those twelve years he had a dependant wife and little children. One of his daughters was a little girl by the name of Mary, and she was blind.

In the dungeon, Bunyan often thought of his poor, little Mary, and his heart would almost break. One occasion he was heard to say, "What sorrow, thou art likely to have in this, my poor blind one. Oh, Mary thou may go naked and hungry and beg in the streets, be beaten and starved and I cannot do anything for thee". Well, Bunyan remained in dungeon, and he have all his concerns, blind Mary included, to the keeping of God. It was toward the end of his imprisonment that he wrote that glorious passage, "Unless I am willing to pluck out my eyes and let the blind lead me, then God Almighty being my witness and my defence, if it shall please Him to let frail life last that long, the moss shall grow on my eyebrow before I surrender my principles or violate my conscience."

My, where have all our heroes gone Where are the men the likes of Daniel and Bunyan and others who saw the principles of obedience to God as the highest commitment a person could ever make in this life. My, the more I look at Daniel, the more there is a desire in my heart to be like him. John says, "the world passeth away,... of God abideth for ever". (1 Jn 2:17) That could have been the epitaph of Daniel's life.

The world and its lusts: its kingdoms: its powers all passed away but old Daniel continued.

He endured all through the years and the changing of kingdoms. Now (Ch 6) introduces us to another change. Here there is a change of world power. (5:30-31) Babylon, the head of gold has been replaced by the Medo- Persian Empire represented by the breast and arms of silver. (2:32) Daniel has now witnessed the rise of two great world powers, the kingdoms which he had predicted in (Ch 2) No doubt in those early years when he was a teenager in Babylon the devil had whispered in Daniel's ear, "Daniel if you want to stay around for a while you had better forget your principles".

But Daniel did not forget his principles and bless God, "Daniel continued". (1:21) "For them that honour me I will honour, saith the Lord". (1 Sam 2:30) Here he was no longer a teenager probably between he was aged between eighty and ninety. He is still in Babylon, living in the midst of luxury: lust: licence, a spiritual man working with government officials who were sinful, sensual, self-seeking. A man of purpose, yes, a man of prayer, yes, but a man of principle and nowhere is that better illustrated for us than in (Ch 6) Now I have divided this fast moving, action packed story into 5 parts. (1) THE ACTION OF THE CROWN Here we see a new regime.

The head of gold has passed the chest and arms of silver has taken its place and see many changes. Notice for e.g.; (a) A NEW AUTHORITY: Darius. Its probable that Darius was Cyrus' military ruler. Remember this was a dual kingship (6:28) Cyrus was the King of the Empire, but Darius ruled Babylon and the area connected with it. (a) (b) A NEW ADMINISTRATION: Look at (6:1) Actually, there were 124 persons involved in the leadership of this new administration. There was Darius the king: the three presidents with Daniel as number one, and 120 princes.

Now there is a change in the nature of this government isn't there You see, Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute monarch, he was autocratic, "whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive". (5:19) Nebuchadnezzar did exactly what he liked but Darius is different. The Medo-Persian throne is a Constitutional Monarchy, not an absolute one. We're going to find that with this change of government there is a change of capital punishment. So you wouldn't fancy the burning fiery furnace, you see that's the way the Babylonians got rid of you.

But the Medes and Persians were different, they kept a den of lions. Mind you it was just as effective if not just as hygienic. So there was (a) (b) and there was: (c) A NEW APPOINTMENT: Look at (6:2) What a place of prominence Daniel occupied. He was truly first. First, in the eyes of the king. The word "preferred", in (6:3) means "he outshone them all". There was a light in Daniel, not found in the other counsellors and cabinet members. Can you not imagine how the crooked dealing of the 120 princes would be cramped by Daniel's eagle eye and relentless integrity For Daniel was not just a great saint he was a good statesman.

Now this is really amazing when you remember: 1. Daniel's BACKGROUND: Here he is being made Prime Minister, a foreigner, a Jew, excelling all the others in Babylon. 2. Daniel's AGE: How old was he Well, some scholars reckon that Daniel was born about 625 BC. When Cyrus along with Darius overthrew Babylon it was about 539BC so Daniel was about 86 years of age. At a time when a man should be slowing down, Daniel was placed in a position of prominence. Indeed "an excellent spirit was in him". (6:3) Wouldn't you like to be like that when you reach old age Who wants to be cantankerous, bitter, cross, obstinate, difficult to get along with My, we need not be put out to pasture just because we are a little older.

Our greatest work for God may be done in old age. Some of the most remarkable people in history have been elderly. William Gladstone was Prime minister of Great Britain at the age of eighty three. Michelangelo did his immortal work Last Judgement when he was eighty nine. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was still preaching many times a day when he was eighty eight. Thomas Edison was still inventing at ninety. Ronald Regan at seventy seven was still President of the USA, exhibiting the exuberance of his personality.

My, do you realise that your best years for God could still be before you 1. 2. 3. Daniel's STAND: Who says it does not pay to serve the Lord My, the promotions of Daniel in Babylon are evidence that a believer does not have to compromise to succeed. (Matt 6:33) The Bible says, "But godliness with contentment is great gain". (1 Tim 6:6) In this life as well, as the life to come. Young folk, will you remember that It pays to be good, right, pure and true. Yes, there was a (a) (b) (c) and there was: (d) A NEW APPROVAL: Look at (6:3) He was planning to make Daniel the official second ruler, and no doubt had ventilated his idea.

Isn't it wonderful to stand back and see once more the hand of God shaping and guiding I mean Daniel's high position was no accident of history. God wanted him in such a place at this crucial time for the seventy year captivity was about to end and Daniel was in a position to influence King Cyrus regarding the return of the Jews to their own land. The fact that the decree in (Ezra Ch 1) is so favourable suggests that Daniel had a part in it. My, History is His Story, and God is in control: God is still running the show: God is on throne, working all things together for His people's good. (1) But look at (6:4) "Then", do you know what that is (2) THE COUNTERACTION OF THE CABINET " Then...

"In a private, carefully guarded room of the palace in Babylon, the governors of more than a hundred provinces gathered secretly. "The king plans to put this fellow Daniel as head over the whole kingdom. He's got to go or we don't have a chance with our own plans. We need to discredit him first in the eyes of the king and destroy him in the process". Its the night of the long knives. The top men have it in for Daniel. They are determined to get him. Why don't they pick on someone their own age My, if you stand for God and God blesses you, there will always be worldly, jealous people who will seek to make a mark on you!

When God takes a man and gifts him and blesses him there will invariably come to that man a floodtide of envy: jealousy, and bitterness and you can expect it. Did you notice the stages in this plot There was: (a) JEALOUSY: The green-eyed monster reared its head. These princes were not too happy about Daniel's success. For one thing he was a Jew and Satan has always hated the Jews and tried to eliminate them. Now why were the princes jealous of Daniel Well, he was where they wanted to be even though soon he would be off the scene.

Someone has said, "envy ever hates the excellence it cannot reach". Jealousy! Something that not only effects the ungodly, but God's people also. The book of Proverbs says, "wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous, but who is able to stand before envy" (27:4) Do you have an envious, jealous streak about you Are you jealous of other believers Their home: children: job: position: property: holidays: their clothes Do you know what envy does It hinders your growth as a believer and ranks you as carnal! (1 Pet 2:1-2 1 Cor 3:1-3) When the young preacher Charles Spurgeon came to London, there was an older preacher there who had been in the city for a long time.

Immediately Spurgeon arrived they could not find a place big enough to hold the crowds who wanted to hear him preach. He was like a star that appeared in the sky. The older pastor said when the great crowds began to gather around Spurgeon, jealousy entered his heart and began to eat him up. There he was, a

famous preacher also, but the crowds were flocking to young Spurgeon. He told the Lord all about it and the Lord began to put praise and prayer into his heart, until the day came when he looked upon every victory Spurgeon had won as his victory.

He said, "I rejoiced and was glad". But here was jealousy. That led to, (b) CONSPIRACY: Look at (6:4) Why did all of those fellows want Daniel's neck Well, if we look at the vast empire under Darius, it was much like modern government. The 120 princes were ripping off the king. Darius was no fool. He knew that the princes were withholding money that they collected from taxation, and that they were using it for themselves and costly government programmes. He knew Daniel's reputation and decided to put him at the top to sort this out.

Do you see why he was hated by the extortioners who had their Rolls Royce chariots and Riviera holidays courtesy of the taxpayers Do you see why they put a detective on the job to find some reason to charge Daniel with wrong Now have a look at this. They examined Daniel's Public Life: (6:4) "concerning the kingdom". His public life was above criticism. They examined Daniel's Private Life: (6:4) But they could not find one accusation to lay against him for all of his eighty odd years.

One day some fellows came to see Charles Haddon Spurgeon. They were trying to blackmail him. They walked into his office and threatened him, saying that if he didn't meet their demands they would publish things that would ruin his reputation. Do you know what he said, "Write all you know about me across the heavens". My, thats the power of a clear conscience! Daniel is trustworthy. He is not corrupt. He is not negligent. He has integrity. Too often Christians are the ones who lack integrity.

They lie. They cheat. They steal. They manipulate. They take advantage of people. You can't rely on them. They are not honest in what they say, do, and promise! They do not work hard. They get by with the least that they can do. My, is this you What if someone put a private investigator to work on your life Would he find you pious on Sunday and living inconsistently on Monday (a) (b) (c) FLATTERY: " King Darius, god for a month", that appealed to his pride. He liked the idea, to think that for thirty days noone could pray to any God, only to him.

The decree was signed. Now if that kind of law were passed in our country, it would not bother a great many people at all. Some people go for thirty days at a time... they go month after month... with never a prayer to the Lord. There are even people who claim to be Christians who for weeks never bow the knee to God in prayer. My, how can a person be saved and never talk to his or her heavenly Father How can a person claim to know the Saviour and never talk to Him in prayer Thirty days, and no prayer... such was the decree of the king!

How would you have reacted if you had been Daniel (3) THE REACTION OF THE CHANCELLOR Did Daniel debate the alternatives There were other options open to him Why not cease praying for 30 days and outwit his enemies Why not change his custom and pray elsewhere, perhaps in secret Why not simply pray inaudibly as he went about his other duties My, thats what Daniel could have done, but look at what Daniel did do. Daniel was not a man who served God only when there was no price to be paid!

You see, there was: (a) NO CHANGE IN HIS PRACTICE: Look at (6:10) Would you be willing to die for prayer Daniel is. When it came to choosing prayer and death or no prayer and life, Daniel chooses prayer and death. For Daniel, prayer has a high level of value. He is willing to die for it. My, what is valuable to you For most of us it's not prayer. It really is not. We would not die for it. You say, "Well I would". But are you living for it Are you making the sacrifices now Are you on your knees praying to God (a) Look Daniel:

1.

LOVES THE USUAL PLACE: " his house". (6:10) He had a place for prayer. (Acts 16:14-15) Have you got a place for prayer The Saviour said, "but when thou prayest... is in secret". (Matt 6:6) Do you get alone with God 2. PLEADS THE USUAL PROMISE: " his windows being open". (6:10) God had said that if His people found themselves in captivity, and if they would pray toward the promised land and the city of Jerusalem, acknowledging their sins, then He would hear their cry, and restore them to the land again. (2 Chron 6:36) In prayer do you plead the promises of God 3.

ADOPTS THE USUAL POSTURE: " He kneeled... "Now we don't have to kneel in prayer but sometimes it helps to humble the position of the body, in order to humble the heart. Can you see the old warrior The writing is signed, the decree is passed, the enemies are joyful, the lions are roaring but Daniel is praying! 4. CONTINUES THE USUAL PLAN: " Three times a day... "He was just like the psalmist who said, "evening and morning and at noon will I pray". (Ps 55:17) He had not only a place for prayer but he had a time for prayer.

Now do you recall his age He's in his mid-eighties That's why God has not taken some of you home yet, that you might engage in the ministry of prayer. Do you recall his position He's Prime Minister! But he took time to pray three times a day because it was a priority in his life! 5. OFFERS THE USUAL PETITIONS: " And gave thanks... " Where did Daniel learn to do this I'll tell you. He's an old man now. He had been taken captive when he was just a teenager, but back in that land where his forefathers were buried, there had been a father and a mother and a godly home, and they had taught their little boy the name of God and the worship of Jehovah, and all the glitter of Babylon could never erase that memory!

How will your children remember you Have they ever caught you praying Did you notice (6:11) Has anybody ever caught you praying Have your children ever caught you praying Would it not make a lasting impact on them if they did Oh, there was (a) (b) NO COMPROMISE OF HIS PRINCIPLES: Loyalty to God came before loyalty to the king! Do you recall that in (Ch 1) Daniel and his three friends were loyal. In (Ch 3) his three friends were loyal. Now in (Ch 6) Daniel is loyal. In (Ch 3) Daniel's three friends were standing when everyone else was kneeling, not Daniel is kneeling to the true God when everyone is standing before a man.

My, what are we to do when the law of man runs contrary to the law of God The believer in Christ has but one option. "We ought to obey God rather than men". (Acts 5:29) Daniel obeyed. The result He was cast into the den of lions! God allowed his servant to be put into the den, just as previously he allowed his three friends to be cast into the furnace, just as he allowed Paul and Silas to be cast into the prison, just as he allowed Fanny Crosby to spend ninety of her ninety five years in blindness!

My, are you in the lions den this... What are the lions in your life Perhaps the lions you confront are illness, or business reverses, or slander or domestic friction. But sooner or later it is inevitable that all of us will face the lions. The Bible says, "be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour". (1 Pet 5:8) My, what are we to do when we face the lions Well, what did Daniel do He simply put his whole trust in God for the new situation in which he found himself! (6:23) And do you know what God delivered him. (Ps 34:7) Now in accient days lions dens were hugh caverns in the ground.

You could look down into them. In fact, most of them had a wall around the top about three feet high. Caverns were usually divided into two sections by a middle wall that had a door. The lion keeper was able

to raise or lower the door from above. He would throw meat into one side of the cavern and then raise the door. The lions would go through, and the keeper would shut the door. He would then go into the other side and clean it. There was usually an opening at one end of the cavern at ground level so that the animals could be put in or taken out.

My, can you visualise this scene Can you see Satan gloating at Daniel's predicament Can you hear him saying, "Old man, you have made your final mistake. You've slipped through my fingers all these years, but I've got you now. You've been an extremist, but now Daniel you're ending up as a late night snack for those big cats". Yet how wrong Satan was for there was: (4) THE INACTION OF THE CREATURES Can you see Daniel as he slides to the floor of the den Do you see as he commits his crisis to God Can you picture him as he leans back against the wall to make himself comfortable for the night The den is damp and chilly.

I see two lion cubs moving in his direction, with obvious friendliness. They nestle close to him providing him with warmth. An old lioness creeps over and lies in front of him, and he strokes their backs and they lick his hand. Before long the Daniel's head is pillowed on one of the cubs, and the four sleep soundly in perfect peace and tranquillity! Poor old Darius is tossing and turning on his comfortable bed, wrecked with fear and guilt and early in the morning he rushes to the scene and he cries out "O Daniel...

"(6:20) My, this was down to: (a) THE ABILITY OF GOD: " Is thy God able" (6:20) Of course God is able. He was able to deliver Daniel's three friends from the furnace and he could deliver Daniel who spent that night not only with the King of the beasts, but with Their Creator... the King of Kings, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. (Rev 5:5) A teacher once asked a Sunday School class if they thought Daniel was afraid, and one little girl answered, "I don't think he was scared, because one of the lions was the Lion of the tribe of Judah who was in there with him".

She knew her Bible didn't she What "lions", are you facing Do you believe that God is able to deliver you Do you believe that "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Ps 34:7) "Is thy God able" God is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him: He is able to make all grace abound: He is able to succour you that are tempted: He is able to keep you from falling. That's the Ability of God, but there was also: (b) THE ACTIVITY OF FAITH: Look at (6:23) Now Daniel wasn't any different from you and me, except in the measure of his faith in God.

My, the history of what has done in a miraculous way from the beginning of Christianity right up to the modern day is contained in what God does for somebody who believes in Him! The great Hall of Faith chapter, Hebrews 11, tells us what happens in the life of those who believe in the Lord. It says there of the prophets they "stopped the mouths of lions". (11:33) What prophet did that Daniel. "He believed in his God". (6:23) The result Well, there was: (5) THE SATISFACTION OF THE CRISIS This crisis turned out satisfactorily.

For the: (a) PROPHET WAS DELIVERED: " Daniel was taken up out of the den". (6:23) Do you know something He could not be put in that den again, for the law was satisfied and the sentence had been carried out. Does that not remind you of Calvary Christ was crucified in my place to take my punishment and He will never go the cross again for that once for all payment is enough for eternity! (a) (b) PRINCES WERE DESTROYED: My, there's no doubt about the ferocity of those beasts. Instead of one tough old Jew, they got a lot of tender, spineless people for breakfast.

The psalmist says concerning the wicked, "He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made". (Ps 7:15) My, can I give you a warning. Its a serious thing when you stretch forth your hand against the Lord's anointed! Never put forth your hand to touch the servant of God unjustly, for both you and your family may suffer, and I have seen this in my lifetime! (a) (b) (c) THE POTENTATE WAS DECLARED: To be the Personal God... "the God of Daniel", the Living God, the Steadfast God, the Eternal God, "his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed", the Active God, "he delivereth and rescueth", the Omnipotent God, "who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions".

Do you know that the same God who is described here is alive today Do you know that God is not dead! He is very much alive! He exists! He's real! J.C. Addie expressed it like this: " When Daniel faithful to His God Would not bow to men And by Gods enemies were hurled Into the lions den God shut the lions mouth we read And robbed them of their prey And the God that lived in Daniel's time Is just the same today." And "This God is our God for ever and ever, He will be our guide even unto death". (Ps 48:14)

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