



Daniel 6:1-23

As you know, we have been following a series based on the song “For I’m building a people of power”. We’ve got to the second half now where it says “Build Your church Lord etc.” It’s a prayer - build Your church Lord. We are a people of prayer, recognising we have a God who is the one who builds church here at Maidstone Road and in Felixstowe and in Britain and to the ends of the Earth.

You’ve already guessed that what I have to say about prayer involves Lions. Here’s male lion – the King of the Beasts. I used to always wonder why we call loins lions if you see what I mean – until I first started going to safari parks. You see, we went to see lions walking around magnificently in their enclosure, but usually all you see is this! (loin lying down picture). Of course! That’s why they’re called loins – because they’re always lion down!

Lions these days are confined to Africa but in the time of Daniel we found also all over Southern Europe and the Middle East. They were hunted relentlessly and also kept as zoo and performing animals. Why? Well apart from being very dangerous large carnivores, they have always been a symbol of strength.

Right down the ages from early hunters, through all the major empires up to the twentieth century, lions were a symbol of strength and power. We see the lion appearing like this strongly in the OT – Samson wrestled a lion. And as we come through the picture of the Lion of Judah in Amos we see Jesus given the title of the Lion of Judah. Why? Because in the lion we see strength and control.

But it’s not that aspect of the lion I want to look at this morning. Because the lion is also the carnivore which devours. The lion is a vicious hunter that shows no mercy. That picture is also scriptural – we see the devil pictured in 1 Peter 5 as a vicious hunter lurking around seeking those he can devour.

It’s that sort of lion which Daniel faced. The story tells us how it happened – it’s a familiar tale. But what actually started all this jealousy off that resulted in Darius being duped into having to throw Daniel into the den of loins! Nasty hungry lions.

The story is told of a man who went to join a circus. He was trained for a trapeze act. Before his first performance he was told to don a gorilla suit as he was being advertised as Guy, the Flying Gorilla. The circus owner told him that you just can’t get real gorillas anyway and training them to do a trapeze act was very difficult and expensive – and the public knew no difference.

One evening whilst I doing the trapeze in his gorilla suit, he made a mistake and fell off the trapeze and landed in the lions cage. He was petrified and started shouting “Help get me out of here!” One of the lions turned to him and said “Shut up you fool, or we’ll both lose our jobs!”

It was prayer. Because Daniel was a man of prayer. One of the things I most want to encourage in the next few months is prayer. Personal prayer, corporate prayer. Why? Because prayer makes a difference. Prayer makes a Daniel. Daniel was a man of prayer – it was obvious. He prayed regularly – three times a day. Everybody knew about it. He prayed because it made a difference.

Do we have the reputation of being people of prayer. How often do we pray? When we feel like it? Only in Church? Once a day? Twice a day? Daniel had cultivated a prayer life.

A W Tozer wrote this: *God can be known satisfactorily only as we devote time to Him. Without meaning to do it we have written our serious fault into our book titles and gospel songs. "A little talk with Jesus," we sing, and we call our books "God's minute," or something else as revealing. The Christian who is satisfied to give God His "minute" and to have a "little talk with Jesus" is the same one who shows up at the evangelistic service weeping over his retarded growth and begging the evangelist to show him the way out of his difficulty.*

Let's look at the difference spending time with God made to Daniel?

◆ Prayer leads to blessing

If you have read the book of Daniel, one thing that is obvious is that he succeeded in a place where he was a captive initially, but rose from that to be a senior figure in first of all Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian government, then in the Persian government and finally in the government of Darius the Mede where we find him in a position of power under the king himself. Why? In the whole of Daniel it is put down to his unwavering faith in God. He was a man of prayer. And out of his faith and prayer life we see a man of integrity in all that he did. *4 Then the other supervisors and the governors tried to find something wrong with the way Daniel administered the empire, but they couldn't, because Daniel was reliable and did not do anything wrong or dishonest.*

Do we want to see God's blessing in our lives? Do we want to see His kingdom extended in the church - "Build your church Lord" - then we need to be people of prayer as well as being people of integrity. Not just a bit here and there – but regular, sustained prayer. Prayer individually, prayer as a church. No blessing? No prayer!

One of my desires is that as a church, our reputation will become that we are people of prayer. That we are renowned for the vitality of our prayer, so much so that even people in our own community know we pray and know what we are about.

◆ Prayer leads to confidence

Daniel was blessed, but it did not mean that Daniel was free of all problems in life. The jealousy and self-seeking of others took him through the ordeal we read. But Daniel knew his God. When he heard about the decree Darius was conned into, what did he do? *10 When Daniel learned that the order had been signed, he went home. In an upstairs room of his house there were windows that faced toward Jerusalem. There, just as he had always done, he knelt down at the open windows and prayed to God three times a day.* Was he deterred from praying even though he was now doing something illegal? Nothing stopped him from doing the right thing. And the right thing was to keep on praying.

What do we do when we face discouragement as Christians? Do we stop coming to church? Do we stop praying? Do we doubt God? Many Christians do. And where does that get us? It may make us feel better in the short term, but what of our relationship with God. Whether it is in good times, or particularly when we hit difficult times; we need to be in the presence of God, laying it before him.

We are not told anything about Daniel's conduct as he was thrown into the den of lions. We know what Darius thought – he was upset that his own authority had been used to con him into this position. Obviously the idea of people only bringing their requests to him was in his mind probably quite a good idea. It asserted his authority – but God had other plans for him. We can be a Daniel or a Darius. Daniel prayed and walked in God's will, Darius put himself first and it resulted in Daniel whom he valued having his life under threat. If we don't pray, then you're a Darius – going by what appeals and what seems right – and it will come back to hit us.

Are we Daniel or Darius?

◆ Prayer leads to deliverance

Prayer makes a difference when God acts. When difficult times come, let's make sure our confidence remains in God as we pray. I expect Daniel kind of wondered what was happening to him. But God shut the lions mouths. Daniel passed through the night unscathed. Because of Daniel's faithfulness, Darius, the conned king believed in Daniel's God.

Sometimes we don't pray because for some reason, we don't feel strongly enough that it makes any

difference. But it does. This man of prayer, Daniel, saw even more blessing for being faithful.

Build Your church Lord, make us strong Lord. How? By being people of prayer – Daniels and seeing God's power at work as we do. Are we ready to make the transition from work to action. We can give it our mental assent – but in the end we need to spend more time with God in our own devotional lives, and particularly as a church.

Lyle Schaller writes, "While it is impossible to prove cause and effect, the evidence strongly suggests that those churches that places a highly visible emphasis on the power of intercessory prayer have a higher ratio of worship attendance of membership than those that give it low visibility."

What about the lions that went without their evening meal for Daniel? Well, it isn't a good idea to try to con the king and the lions got an unexpected banquet.

Let's pray.

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