

Message #1066
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"THE DAY THE LIONS' MOUTHS WERE SHUT"

{Daniel 6}

Trinity Presbyterian Church

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EVERYONE LOVES A STORY

Some of my favorite memories as a child was hearing my mother and father read stories to me.

...as I grew older, I enjoyed reading myself

...I could hardly wait for the latest in the "Hardy Boys" or

"Sugar Creek Gang" series to be released.

My grandson, Kristopher, is an avid reader. Some months ago when he and Jacquie spent the night with us Kris and I read from one of my "Chicken Soup for the Soul" books and he loved it. {He ran into the room where Jacquie and Irma were reading and told them what we had read nearly word-for-word.}

...I got a copy of "Chicken Soup for Kids" and he loves it

...Every time I see him he tells me of yet another story he's read from the book

He also eagerly awaits the release of the sixth "Harry Potter" book by J. K. Rowling.

...the most popular kids series of all time...stretching the imaginations of children and adults worldwide.

...over 260 million copies have been sold of the first five volumes.

...in July Rowling opened a website that gives a glimpse into the sixth book soon to be released.

...in 8 short weeks there have been 220 million hits

This morning we're going to talk about one of the most famous stories ever told:

Daniel and the Lions' Den.

...this story has lasted for over 2,500 years

...it ranks among the all-time favorites for young and old

...it is even more popular than the Harry Potter Books.

Let's take a fresh look at this fantastic story.

MAIN THEME OF THE STORY: BELIEVERS ARE NOT IMMUNE TO TRIALS AND TOUGH TIMES

The good news about this story is centered around Daniel's deliverance/resurrection from the lion's den...just as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had been delivered from the fiery furnace.

The sobering news, however, is that the deliverance of Daniel's three friends came while they were IN the furnace...Daniel's while he was IN the lion's den! Both events are stages for God to perform incredible miracles!

In Hebrews 11:33-34 {that great chapter of faith in the New Testament}

we read...

"...{some} through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword..."

The point is...God is the one who shut the mouths of the lions!

...God is the one who gifted Daniel...and his friends...with faith!

...God is the one who delivers Daniel {and who delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.}

These all knew there was a possibility that they could well lose their lives as the

three friends stated to Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 3...

"IF we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve IS able to save us from it, and He WILL rescue us from your hand, O king. But EVEN IF HE DOES NOT we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up!"

That is the whole premise of Rabbi Harold S. Kushner's book, "WHEN Bad Things Happen to Good People."

...there is no immunization from evil

...believers...and non-believers...face tough times

...Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were put into the fiery furnace--but God was with them!

...Daniel was placed into the den of lions...but God was there with him.

...Jesus went to the cross...but God resurrected Him and had exalted Him and given Him a name above all names!

And, friends, you and I WILL face tough times--we all do...but God has promised to be with us.

...Kushner's correct in titling his book, "When..." instead of "Why...!"

...they are inevitable

...so how do we prepare for them?

...how do we deal with them?

...how do we recover from them?

Hear what Paul wrote to Timothy--

"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus WILL be persecuted!" {3:12}

One of my favorite passages in all the Bible emphasizes this--but, it also offers incredible hope: Isaiah 43

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, YOU ARE MINE.

WHEN you pass through the waters, I WILL BE WITH YOU; and WHEN you pass through the rivers, THEY WILL NOT SWEEP OVER YOU. WHEN you walk through the fire, YOU WILL NOT BE BURNED; THE FLAMES WILL NOT SET YOU ABLAZE. For I am the Lord, your God...your Savior...You are precious and honored in My sight, and...I love you...do not be afraid for I am with you!"

Note the word "WHEN"--but note that each scenario presented gives assurance of God's presence!

Dr. Robert Schuller hit the nail on the head when he wrote: "Tough Times NEVER last...tough people do!"

...the only way we last is because of God's promises

...He has not promised a bed of roses

...He has not promised life without difficulty

...He has not promised that just because we're believers we will never go through tough times... trials... temptation... and persecution!

...He has not promised spiritual immunity

He HAS promised to never leave us...never forsake us!

He HAS promised to go with us through every difficulty and trial...and don't you ever forget that!

He HAS told us that He loves us!

...that we belong to Him

...that He knows all about us and what we're going through

He HAS told us that we are honored in His sight!

...we are special

So...don't ever give in to the "why me?" syndrome!

...what if Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego had taken that attitude?

...Daniel?

...we would've missed a miracle from God

...what if Jesus had taken that attitude before facing the cross?

...there would be no forgiveness

...no salvation

...no justification

...no resurrection

...no eternal life

Expect "tough times" and when they come say, "Here we go God...stand by me!"

That was the attitude of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego...and Daniel!

Today's story is about Daniel's tough times and how he faced them...and how God was with him through the entire experience.

CONSPIRACY AGAINST DANIEL {6: 1-10}

Daniel had been around for some time...

...he could well have been in his late 70's, early 80's

...he had gained an impeccable reputation.

It is said that he had "exceptional qualities" and King Darius "planned to set him over the whole kingdom."

Daniel was also a man of prayer...

"Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed giving thanks to his God..."

...he didn't wait until his back was against the wall to call upon the Lord

...he was in daily communication with His God!

As is so often the case--one persons success doesn't always bring glee to others.

{I've said before, some find it much easier to weep with those who weep than to rejoice with those who rejoice!}

Others who were in King Darius' Administration sought to find ways to bring charges against Daniel to bring him down, however, they were unsuccessful--he was a man with whom they could find no fault!

...he was trustworthy

...he was neither corrupt nor negligent.

...so they devise a plot to frame him.

...they went to the king and said...

"O King Darius, live forever! 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 man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den."

...the king agreed and put it into writing

...it became the law of the Medes and the Persians

...and the trap was set

So, what would Daniel do?

...would he compromise?

...would he pray in secret?

...would he refrain from praying for thirty days?

DANIEL IS CONDEMNED TO THE DEN OF LIONS {6: 11-18}

"When Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem...got down on his knees and prayed... three times a day!"

His conspirators found Daniel on his knees asking God for help so they went and reported to the king.

...the king agreed that the law he had set up could not be broken

...yet, he cared for Daniel

...he was greatly distressed for finding himself in this situation

...he made every effort to save Daniel

...but that was beyond his power.

"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!'"

...the den was sealed with a stone

...and the king spent a sleepless night

...the situation--like man of ours--seemed hopeless

THE RESURRECTION OF DANIEL {6:19-28}

One thing Daniel's oppressors had not counted on...DANIEL'S GOD!

...the very God who had promised to be with us in tough times

...the same God who had promised to ALWAYS be with us

In the morning the king hurried to the lions' den and called to Daniel...

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

...I think that's hilarious

...I also think it's an act of faith on Darius' part

...I believe it shows Darius actually expected a miracle!

"Daniel answered, 'O 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, O king!'"

Darius is overjoyed

...Daniel is lifted from the den without a wound

...and those who plotted his demise were thrown into the den and "before they reached the floor of the

den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones."

And Darius praises God...and Daniel prospered.

CONCLUSION

This story reminds us of another event that takes place in the New Testament of another exceptional man. One...

...who healed paralytics

...calmed storms

...even brought people back from the dead

One whom others plotted to destroy

...one who laid down His life so others might have life

...one who died on a cross

...was placed in a tomb sealed with a stone

...and one whom God raised triumphantly

He knows what you're going through...

...He knew tough times

...He knew betrayal

He prayed not His will but God's will be done.

...and He prayed for us

...and promised to be IN us...

...in good times

...in tough times

Have you placed your trust in Him?

...Daniel did

...Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did

...and you?

Our God is a mighty God! Believe it...trust Him!