

Daniel 6:1-28
June 28, '09

“GOD AT WORK IN THE LIFE OF DANIEL”

THIS SUMMER, ASIDE FROM THE NEXT TWO SUNDAYS WHEN PAULA VINER WILL BE PREACHING, WE’RE GOING TO BE LOOKING AT THE WAY GOD WORKED IN THE LIFE OF VARIOUS INDIVIDUALS.

WE’LL FOCUS ON TWO FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT, TWO FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT, TWO FROM CHURCH HISTORY & THEN CONCLUDE BY SEEING HOW GOD IS AT WORK IN THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS TODAY.

WE BEGAN LAST WEEK BY LOOKING AT THE PROPHET ELISHA.

TODAY, WE TURN OUR ATTENTION TO ONE OF THE MOST WELL-KNOWN CHARACTERS OF THE BIBLE & ONE OF THE MOST-BELOVED STORIES IN ALL OF SCRIPTURE.

EVERY CHILD GROWS UP WITH A FAVORITE STORY.

MAYBE THERE WAS A TALE THAT WAS TOLD TO YOU AT BEDTIME OR A BOOK THAT WAS READ OVER & OVER UNTIL YOU COULD VIRTUALLY RECITE IT FROM MEMORY.

FOR ME, I REMEMBER GROWING UP WITH THE BOXCAR CHILDREN OR HAVING THE WIZARD OF OZ READ BEFORE BEDTIME.

SOME OF THOSE FAVORITE CHILDHOOD STORIES ARE ALSO STORIES WE FIND IN THE BIBLE.

I REMEMBER GOING TO THE *SHORES THEATER* AS A CHILD & SEEING A RE-RELEASE OF THE HEDY LAMARR/VICTOR MATURE MOVIE “SAMSON & DELILAH” AND THEN RUSHING HOME TO READ THE STORY IN THE BIBLE.

I WAS ASTONISHED THAT THE EXCITING STORY I’D JUST SEEN AT THE MOVIE THEATER WAS TAKEN FROM SCRIPTURE.

ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE EXCITING STORIES IN THE BIBLE – ONE THAT VIRTUALLY EVERY CHILD LEARNS IN SUNDAY SCHOOL - IS THE STORY WE CALL “DANIEL IN THE LIONS’ DEN.”

I WANT US TO LOOK AT THAT STORY TODAY, BUT BEFORE WE DO, I THINK SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION WILL HELP US PUT IT IN PROPER PERSPECTIVE.

THE BOOK OF DANIEL CAN EASILY BE DIVIDED INTO TWO ESSENTIALLY EQUAL PARTS.

THE FIRST 6 CHAPTERS CONTAIN 6 STORIES, 5 OF WHICH CONCERN DANIEL, AND ONE WHICH CENTERS ON 3 OF DANIEL’S FRIENDS.

THE FINAL 6 CHAPTERS CONSIST OF 4 VISIONS DANIEL RECEIVED.

THE MAJOR QUESTION THAT IS RAISED WITH THE BOOK OF DANIEL IS THE TIME IN WHICH IT WAS WRITTEN.

WAS IT COMPOSED IN THE 6TH CENTURY B.C., MAKING IT A BOOK OF PROPHECY BECAUSE OF THE EVENTS IT MENTIONS THAT DIDN’T TAKE PLACE FOR ANOTHER 400 YEARS?

OR IS IT A PRIMARILY A BOOK OF HISTORY, REMINDING PEOPLE OF PAST HEROES WHO STOOD FIRM IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION?

I THINK THE EVIDENCE CLEARLY POINTS TO THE LATTER.

THE WRITER OF DANIEL IS SOMEONE WHO LIVED IN THE 2ND CENTURY B.C.

HE WRITES AS IF HE WERE LIVING IN THE 6TH CENTURY B.C. AND TELLING TALES OF DANIEL & HIS FRIENDS AS IF HE WERE WRITING AT THE TIME THESE EVENTS WERE TAKING PLACE.

HE'S NOT TRYING TO FOOL US, THOUGH.

PEOPLE OF THAT TIME WOULD HAVE KNOWN CLEARLY WHAT HE WAS DOING BECAUSE THE STYLE OF THE BOOK WAS A POPULAR WAY OF WRITING IN THAT TIME PERIOD.

HE UTILIZES SOMETHING CALLED APOCALYPTIC WRITING, SIMILAR TO WHAT WE FIND IN THE BOOK OF *REVELATION* IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

THE WRITER WAS LIVING IN THE SECOND CENTURY B.C. - A TIME WHEN JEWS WERE BEING PERSECUTED.

THEY WERE BEING FORCED TO DENOUNCE THEIR FAITH – TO SWEAR ALLEGIANCE TO FOREIGN & FALSE GODS.

THEIR VERY LIVES WERE THREATENED IF THEY REFUSED TO ACQUIESCE TO THE DEMANDS OF THEIR OPPRESSORS.

IT'S AGAINST THIS BACKDROP THAT THE WRITER OF DANIEL OFFERS HIS MAGNIFICENT & POWERFUL CHALLENGE TO PEOPLE OF FAITH.

“DON'T GIVE UP & DON'T GIVE IN. GOD HAS STRENGTHENED & PROTECTED HIS PEOPLE IN THE PAST & HE'LL SURELY DO THE SAME FOR US.”

WITH THAT BACKGROUND, LISTEN TO THIS FAVORITE CHILDHOOD SUNDAY SCHOOL STORY, AND PONDER WHAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE TO HEAR IT IN THE MIDST OF THREATS AGAINST YOUR LIFE IF YOU REFUSED TO COMPROMISE YOUR STANDARDS OF BELIEF & YOUR STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR.

I WANT US TO HEAR THE ENTIRE STORY OF “DANIEL IN THE LIONS’ DEN.”

I'M GOING TO BE READING FROM EUGENE PETERSON'S TRANSLATION, THE MESSAGE.

IT'S A VERY ACCURATE TRANSLATION, BUT ONE WHICH PUTS THE STORY INTO MORE MODERN LANGUAGE.

DANIEL 6:1-28.

(After scripture)

IT'S HARD FOR MOST OF US TO RELATE TO A STORY SUCH AS THIS, ISN'T IT?

WE CAN'T FULLY APPRECIATE WHAT IT WOULD HAVE FELT LIKE FOR FAITHFUL, BUT THREATENED JEWS TO HEAR THIS STORY IN THE SECOND CENTURY B.C. AS THEY FACED THE VERY SAME THREATS THAT DANIEL HAD FACED 400 YEARS BEFORE.

BUT OVER THE PAST 2,200 YEARS, THERE HAVE BEEN THOUSANDS UPON THOUSANDS WHO HAVE FOUND STRENGTH & ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THESE WORDS BECAUSE THEIR OWN CIRCUMSTANCES MIRROR THAT OF DANIEL.

CONSIDER FAITHFUL CHURCH LEADERS IN THE LAST CENTURY IN GERMANY.

THEY SAW ADOLF HITLER RISE TO POWER IN 1933.

WITHIN 3 MONTHS THEY WITNESSED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CONVENTION THAT CALLED FOR THE REORGANIZATION OF 27 DENOMINATIONS INTO A SINGLE, NATIONAL CHURCH UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF A NATIONAL BISHOP.

THEY LISTENED AS A LEADING THEOLOGIAN SAID *“OUR PROTESTANT CHURCHES HAVE WELCOMED THE TURNING POINT OF 1933 AS A GIFT AND MIRACLE OF GOD.”*

THEY WATCHED AS A FERVENT NAZI WAS ELECTED NATIONAL BISHOP.

THEY EXPERIENCED THE HORROR OF RESTRICTIONS PLACED ON CLERGY, WHICH DEMANDED THEY BE “POLITICALLY RELIABLE” AND ACCEPT THE SUPERIORITY OF THE “ARYAN RACE.”

PRESSURE WAS EXERTED TO EXPEL JEWISH CHRISTIANS FROM MINISTRY.

THE NAZI “FUHRER PRINCIPLE” WAS TO BE ADOPTED BY THE CHURCHES, WHICH WAS A CLAIM THAT HITLER WAS “LORD” OVER THE GERMAN CHURCH & THAT CHRIST & THE CHRISTIAN FAITH ITSELF WERE UNIQUELY ARYAN.

WHILE THE SO-CALLED “GERMAN CHRISTIANS” SAW NO CONFLICT BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY & THE IDEALS OF HITLER’S NATIONAL SOCIALISM, THERE WERE SOME CHRISTIANS WHO WERE BOLD ENOUGH TO STAND UP & SPEAK OUT IN OPPOSITION.

ON MAY 29, 1934, LED BY PASTOR MARTIN NIEMOLLER, 139 DELEGATES OF THE NEWLY-FORMED CONFESSING CHURCH MOVEMENT GATHERED TOGETHER IN BARMEN, AND ADOPTED “THE THEOLOGICAL DECLARATION OF BARMEN,” WRITTEN PRIMARILY BY KARL BARTH, THE MOST INFLUENTIAL THEOLOGIAN OF THE 20TH CENTURY.

THIS DOCUMENT STATED CLEARLY THAT JESUS CHRIST ALONE IS LORD OF EVERY AREA OF LIFE. THE CHURCH, IT STATED, MUST OBEY HIM & REJECT ANY TEACHING THAT IS CONTRARY TO THE TEACHINGS OF CHRIST.

THOSE WHO WERE PART OF THAT GATHERING WERE RISKING THEIR LIVES TO BE THERE.

SOME WERE IMPRISONED, WHILE OTHERS WERE OSTRACIZED, PERSECUTED OR EVEN MARTYRED FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION.

THE THEOLOGICAL DECLARATION OF BARMEN IS NOW PART OF OUR PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH *BOOK OF CONFESIONS* & STANDS ALONGSIDE THE NICENE & APOSTLES’ CREED AS ONE OF THE GREAT STATEMENTS OF BELIEF IN THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY.

WHAT MUST THE STORY OF DANIEL IN THE LIONS’ DEN HAVE MEANT TO THOSE WHO GATHERED AMID THE STORM OF PERSECUTION SURROUNDING THEM?

TWO WEEKS AGO, IN OUR THEOLOGY & PHILM SERIES, WE WATCHED AND DISCUSSED “CHARIOTS OF FIRE” & CONSIDERED THE ASTOUNDING CHARACTER OF ERIC LIDDELL WHO FACED A SIMILAR STORM OF OPPOSITION FOR HIS REFUSAL TO RUN ON SUNDAY – EVEN IN THE OLYMPICS.

WHAT MUST THE STORY OF DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN HAVE MEANT TO HIM?

RARELY WILL ANY OF US BE PLACED IN A SITUATION EVEN REMOTELY SIMILAR TO THAT OF KARL BARTH, MARTIN NIEMOLLER & THE CONFESSING CHRISTIANS OF NAZI GERMANY.

IT IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT WE WILL BE PRESSURED BY POLITICIANS AS ERIC LIDDELL WAS TO COMPROMISE OUR CHRISTIAN STANDARDS.

AND YET, IN LESSER, YET EQUALLY IMPORTANT WAYS, WE ALL FACE SUCH THINGS EVERY DAY, DON'T WE?

THE WORLD LOOKS CAUSTICALLY & CYNICALLY AT CHRISTIAN STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR.

IT'S SO EASY TO ACQUIESCE TO THE WORLD AROUND US – SO EASY TO COMPROMISE OUR STANDARDS IN THE FACE OF JUDGMENT, RIDICULE, SCORN & DERISION.

THE LESSON IS NO DIFFERENT FOR US TODAY THAN IT WAS FOR THE JEWS OF THE SECOND CENTURY B.C. TO WHOM THIS STORY WAS FIRST ADDRESSED.

“DON'T GIVE UP & DON'T GIVE IN. GOD HAS STRENGTHENED & PROTECTED HIS PEOPLE IN THE PAST & HE'LL SURELY DO THE SAME FOR US.”

I THINK THIS IS THE PRIMARY LESSON OF THE STORY OF DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN.

BUT THERE'S ANOTHER LESSON HERE AS WELL.

IT'S A LESSON THAT'S ALSO FOUND IN THE OTHER FAVORITE STORY IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL – THAT OF HIS THREE FRIENDS IN THE FIERY FURNACE.

WHEN DANIEL WAS THROWN INTO THE LIONS' DEN, HE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THE OUTCOME WOULD BE.

SO, TOO, WITH SHADRACH, MESHACH & ABEDNEGO.

THEY KNEW THERE WAS A GOOD CHANCE THEY WOULD DIE.

LISTEN TO WHAT THEY SAID TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR:

“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 IF NOT, WE WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT WE WON'T SERVE YOUR GODS OR WORSHIP THE IMAGE OF GOLD YOU'VE SET UP.”

NOTICE THAT – *“BUT IF NOT...”*

THAT WAS DANIEL'S OUTLOOK AS WELL.

HE DIDN'T KNOW IF HE WOULD BE DELIVERED FROM THE MOUTHS OF THE LIONS.

COMMON SENSE TOLD HIM THEY WOULD QUICKLY TEAR HIM TO SHREDS & EAT HIM ALIVE.

SO, TOO, WITH US IN EVERY TRIAL WE FACE IN LIFE.

WE DON'T KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS.

BUT WE DO KNOW WHO HOLDS THE FUTURE.

WE NEVER KNOW THE OUTCOME OF THE STRUGGLES WE WILL FACE IN LIFE.

OF THIS & THIS ALONE, WE CAN BE ASSURED – THE STRUGGLES WILL EXIST.

AS CHRISTIANS, WE AREN'T IMMUNE TO HARD TIMES.

WE WILL ALL ENDURE DIFFICULTIES IN LIFE.

LIKE DANIEL, LIKE SHADRACH, MESHACH & ABEDNEGO, LIKE MARTIN NIEMOLLER, KARL BARTH & THE CONFESSING CHRISTIANS OF NAZI GERMANY, LIKE ERIC LIDDELL, WE DON'T KNOW WHAT THE OUTCOME OF THOSE STRUGGLES WILL BE.

THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES.

WE DON'T KNOW THAT THE LIONS' MOUTHS WILL BE HELD SHUT.

WE DON'T KNOW THAT THE FLAMES OF THE FURNACE WON'T TOUCH US.

WE ARE SIMPLY CALLED TO BE FAITHFUL.

OF ONE THING WE CAN BE CERTAIN.

GOD WILL BE WITH US IN OUR STRUGGLES.

GOD WILL STAND BY OUR SIDE IN THE MIDST OF OUR OWN LIONS' DEN & FIERY FURNACE.

IN THE BEAUTIFUL 43RD CHAPTER OF ISAIAH, WE READ THESE WORDS:

"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. FOR I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD...DO NOT BE AFRAID, FOR I AM WITH YOU."

NOTE THE IMPORTANCE OF TWO WORDS IN THIS PASSAGE – "WHEN" AND "WITH."

IT'S NOT A QUESTION OF "IF" – IT'S "WHEN."

YOU WILL FACE TRIALS & STRUGGLES & STORMS IN LIFE.

BUT EQUALLY IMPORTANT IS THE WORD "WITH."

IN EVERY ONE OF THOSE TRIALS, IN ALL OF YOUR STRUGGLES, IN EVERY STORM THAT YOU ENDURE, GOD PROMISES TO BE "WITH" YOU.

GOD WAS THERE IN THE LIONS' DEN & GOD WAS THERE IN THE FIERY FURNACE.

GOD SAID TO JOSHUA IN THE OLD TESTAMENT WORDS THAT ARE REPEATED IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: *"I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU OR FORSAKE YOU."*

IN JESUS' LAST WORDS TO HIS DISCIPLES BEFORE HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, HE OFFERED THE SAME PROMISE: *"I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE CLOSE OF THE AGE."*

PAUL, IN WRITING TO THE ROMANS SAID, *"THERE IS NOTHING – NOTHING IN THIS WORLD OR THE NEXT – NOTHING IN ALL CREATION THAT CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD."*

IN THE BOOK OF MARK & ON THE COVER OF OUR BULLETIN THIS MORNING, JESUS SAYS: *"DO NOT FEAR – ONLY BELIEVE."*

THE WONDROUS CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL STORY OF DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN IS A STORY FOR ALL AGES & ALL STAGES OF LIFE.

AMID YOUR STRUGGLES & YOUR STORMS, GOD IS THERE IN YOUR MIDST. AMEN.

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