

Theme: Innocent in God's Sight

King Darius of the Persian Empire and his buddies, the Medes, toppled the Babylonian Empire after which time he appointed 120 satraps over his new kingdom with 3 administrators over them. Persian government, Persian rulers, you'd think. But Daniel, the Israelite, was one of the three and the one Darius planned to place over the whole kingdom! Daniel, the same Daniel who advised the old government. This didn't often happen, but Daniel was exceptional and must have immediately won respect and admiration. Daniel made it through regime change, a success by most, but a disaster if he's your competition. In jealousy, a contingent of satraps exploited Daniel's faith and had Darius hurry up and sign an edict that only he should be prayed to for the next 30 days or be thrown in the lions' den.

“Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.” (Daniel 6:10) When worship of God became illegal under penalty of death, he went home and prayed seeking God's guidance, just like he'd done from every other day until that one, three times a day, still with his windows facing Jerusalem wide open. As predictably orchestrated, Daniel was caught red-handed doing this, *“...these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.” (Daniel 6:11)*

If we're gonna do some reforming this Reformation day, what a wonderful and timely reformer we find in Daniel, the ancient advisor and prophet. Let's be like Daniel, who with full knowledge of the injustice and the penalty, abided it all without losing his cool at the schemers or Darius, not a single mention of a counter suit in court, but fervent prayer to his savior God. Let's pray rather than lashing out defensively or being the first in line to announce, “Injustice against me because of my faith!” Daniel's an extreme example, but in faith and because of his faith, he took a death sentence on the chin mindful of his home in heaven. Certainly, we can let the slights, those we make up and the actual ones, roll off our backs with a smile and carry on in love and joy. Right? We can. We have Jesus! Be a Daniel. Receive hate with grace and the results will be better for it. Instead of anger, say, “The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The LORD look on you with favor and give you peace.” Petition God on behalf of others, to have mercy on them, care for their needs, for God to bless them. Ask God's mercy for yourself, that always we'd find favor before him.

When it was reported that Daniel had broken the law, Darius did everything he could to change his fate, knowing he couldn't without undermining himself. As they threw Daniel into the lions' den, Darius shouted, "May the God you serve all the time save you!" A stone was placed over it sealed by the rings of king and other nobles. No fun, food, or sleep for the king, just stress. I don't imagine it was an easy night in dreamland for Daniel either. Darkness and hungry lions in deadly proximity would see to that. I don't imagine his praying stopped that whole time. Did he offer these or similarly loved prayers of God's people? **Psalm 34:7, 22**, "*The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.*" ²² *The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.*" **Psalm 51:17**, "*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*" God was listening.

At dawn, Darius cried out for Daniel by what he most closely associated with him, "*Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions.*" (**Daniel 6:20**) "Your majesty, you're awesome! My God did exactly as you hoped he would!" "*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, Your Majesty.*" (**Daniel 6:22**) What was he going through?? Imagine Daniel's stunned surreal realization of coming out of the den into light and knowing the sustained scrape with death was over, without even a scratch. Daniel knew God was for him. Daniel knew without a doubt he was innocent in God's sight in this regard and in general. Daniel knew he was righteous because he believed in God.

The last thing expected was for Daniel to come out of there unscathed, but he did because he trusted in his God and was found innocent. This is how it goes for you, too. You come out unscathed from this life. This is our hope, our truth, because Jesus, the healing balm, makes the wounded, all of us, whole. Jesus heals our sin-sick souls. Imagine the stunned, surreal, but most excellent and absolutely assuredly yours realization of coming out of the pit of this life thinking for sure you were wounded during that dark and bleary ordeal only to come into the full light of life and looking yourself over for injuries not able to find any. Then, you make eye contact with a Lamb that looks like it had been slain and you'll understand like you never have before just how much God is for you because you'll really know that by his wounds, Jesus, the Son of God's wounds, his death on the cross wounds, you have been healed. And you'll smile. How can you not when you look at your Savior Jesus? All of this is yours right now.

So, live like it is. You have Jesus' peace and the Spirit's power to imitate Daniel and also echo the excellent words of praise from King Darius, "*For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end.*"²⁷ *He rescues and he saved; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.*" (Daniel 6:26, 27) What a God we have. Right on, Darius.

God has saved you, probably not from a lion, but God has absolutely saved you. From what? Yourself. God has saved us from ourselves, from our sinful natures with their wide open jaws and insatiable appetites. Jesus saved you from your sins and in doing so, silenced the roaring of our enemy, the Devil, who prowls around us like a lion, but cowers defeated before Jesus. That's why Jesus came here, ya know. To find and save you and when you were lost and dead in darkness and to destroy the devil's work which is to accuse you of sin. He can't do that anymore because Jesus has taken it away, all of it, muzzled the devil, chained him up, and hurled him into the Abyss. Satan's defeated. You are innocent. You will rise. "*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*"³¹ *If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:1, 31).

You have found favor with God, been made righteous, through faith in Jesus, and this, not from yourself, but a gift of God's grace. You have God's mercy and you have so much of it. Remember that when your conscience roars condemnation at you and it'll quite on down. Jesus himself gently speaks right to you that your sin is forgiven, that your faith has saved you. Those gentle words, quietly said, seem to drown out a world of noise and leave you at peace. You are innocent in God's sight. That's how you stand, able to take whatever on the chin because you know God is for you and what he's done for you. He's your strength, your son, your salvation. Amen.