

## Light in Darkness - Enduring Conflict

8/25/24

In 1864, the bronze two – cent piece was the first coin to bore the inscription “In God We Trust”. Then In 1865, Congress ok’s the motto to be placed on the gold and silver coins as well that were minted by the U.S. Treasury. In 1907, Teddy Roosevelt, President of the United States at that time, didn’t like the designs on American coins – he thought they were boring or putting it more simply they were in poor design. So, he got American sculptor Augustus Saint – Gaudens, to design some new coins. The sculptor thought the motto “In God We Trust” would take away from his art design of the coin and Roosevelt agreed. Also, Roosevelt felt God’s name shouldn’t be put on a coin – sacrilege. So, without Congress approval, Teddy Roosevelt had the \$10.00 coin and the \$20.00 coin minted with no “In God We Trust” inscription. The public outcry was very great. Several groups organized to fight for the old motto. Congress quickly got involved and in 1908, passed a bill to require the motto to be on certain coins. This is just a small example of a conflict between a Christian idea and the culture idea. All through our history we have seen how Christian values are always under attack by someone or some group. However, we have never seen anything like we’re seeing now with the fight against Christian values. Christian colleges are under attack. Christian businesses are under attack. We see an example of this from the cake decorator in Colorado who is being sued again even though he had already won a case in the Supreme Court for choosing to not make a cake that goes against his Christian values. A few months ago, I heard on NPR news they were interviewing the attorney that is suing the cake decorator and they said they will keep suing him until they win. In other words, it doesn’t matter what the Supreme Court states, they’ll keep suing till the business closes because of expense of court costs. I heard a few weeks ago on NPR news that when Evangelical pastors preach on how evil events may get worse in America, they are preaching hate speech because it will make the right more far right. So, even if a pastor is trying to get his congregation ready in case things do get worse, our culture views this as a form of hate speech even though Paul and Peter did the same thing during their day –

warn the Church that things will get worse and worse till Jesus comes back for the second and last time. I read this from a commentary, "Persecution is the action of threatened people. And many Christians around the world must face it every day. Christianity, when lived correctly, invites persecution because of its challenge to the world (Wesley Bible Curriculum)." In other words, when the Church is the light in a dark world, persecution will come at some point. We should not be surprised by this or shocked by how vicious our culture can be. Jesus was treated horribly when He walked on this earth and His Disciples weren't treated any better. So, how should we react when persecution comes our way when we are light in a dark world? Let's look as this is the final sermon on this series we've been doing for three months.

Let's turn to Daniel 6 where we see the example set for us on how to handle persecution. The story goes like this, "6 <sup>1</sup>Darius the Mede decided to divide the kingdom into 120 provinces, and he appointed a high officer to rule over each province. <sup>2</sup>The king also chose Daniel and two others as administrators to supervise the high officers and protect the king's interests. <sup>3</sup> Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers. Because of Daniel's great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire.

<sup>4</sup> Then the other administrators and high officers began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling government affairs, but they couldn't find anything to criticize or condemn. He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy. <sup>5</sup> So they concluded, "Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the rules of his religion."

<sup>6</sup> So the administrators and high officers went to the king and said, "Long live King Darius! <sup>7</sup> We are all in agreement—we administrators, officials, high officers, advisers, and governors—that the king should make a law that will be strictly enforced. Give orders that for the next thirty days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to you, Your Majesty—will be thrown into the den of lions. <sup>8</sup> And now, Your Majesty, issue and sign this law so it cannot be changed, an official law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked." <sup>9</sup> So King Darius signed the law.

<sup>10</sup> But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God. <sup>11</sup> Then the officials went together to Daniel's house and found him praying and asking for God's help. <sup>12</sup> So they went straight to the king and reminded him about his law. "Did you not sign a law



that for the next thirty days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to you, Your Majesty—will be thrown into the den of lions?”

“Yes,” the king replied, “that decision stands; it is an official law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked.”

<sup>13</sup> Then they told the king, “That man Daniel, one of the captives from Judah, is ignoring you and your law. He still prays to his God three times a day.”

<sup>14</sup> Hearing this, the king was deeply troubled, and he tried to think of a way to save Daniel. He spent the rest of the day looking for a way to get Daniel out of this predicament.

<sup>15</sup> In the evening the men went together to the king and said, “Your Majesty, you know that according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, no law that the king signs can be changed.”

<sup>16</sup> So at last the king gave orders for Daniel to be arrested and thrown into the den of lions. The king said to him, “May your God, whom you serve so faithfully, rescue you.”

<sup>17</sup> A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den. The king sealed the stone with his own royal seal and the seals of his nobles, so that no one could rescue Daniel. <sup>18</sup> Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night fasting. He refused his usual entertainment and couldn’t sleep at all that night.

<sup>19</sup> Very early the next morning, the king got up and hurried out to the lions’ den. <sup>20</sup> When he got there, he called out in anguish, “Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God, whom you serve so faithfully, able to rescue you from the lions?”

<sup>21</sup> Daniel answered, “Long live the king! <sup>22</sup> My God sent his angel to shut the lions’ mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in his sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty.”

<sup>23</sup> The king was overjoyed and ordered that Daniel be lifted from the den. Not a scratch was found on him, for he had trusted in his God.

<sup>24</sup> Then the king gave orders to arrest the men who had maliciously accused Daniel. He had them thrown into the lions’ den, along with their wives and children. The lions leaped on them and tore them apart before they even hit the floor of the den.

(Biblegateway)

We've been looking at Daniel for the past few weeks. Here, we see Daniel getting into trouble with the king of Babylon. Last week, we had talked about how God dealt with the pride of the king. Now, time has past and Daniel is about 80 years old and a different king is on the throne – Darius the Mede. Daniel had risen through the ranks and now become a supervisor with much authority in the government. Even though Daniel was a captive and not a native Babylonian, he still rose through the ranks. In fact, verse 3 tells us that the king was making plans to make Daniel second in charge under the king. Scripture tells us that Daniel was more capable than the other leaders in the king's administration and Daniel had God given ability to be a real leader. The king saw this and he knew who the best candidate was for the job. Scripture also tells us in verse 4 that Daniel was faithful, honest, and always responsible. In Ezekiel 14:14, God is passing judgment on Israel's leaders, God uses Daniel as an example by stating this, "Even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were there, their righteousness would save no one but themselves, declares the Sovereign Lord. (NLT, 1214)" God sees Daniel as being righteous. The Hebrew term used here for "righteousness" is "s daqa" which means doing what is right; acting according to God's standard (Strong's Concordance). So, Daniel is faithful, honest, and always was responsible. Plus, God saw Daniel as being righteous. Daniel lived his life living out God's standards to living a holy life. Proverbs 21:2 tells us this, "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart. To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. (ESV, 462)" Daniel was only living out what the Lord wanted and Daniel loved the Lord with all his heart and strength (Deuteronomy 6: 4 – 6). This was the character of Daniel – God saw him as righteous in a dark world.

Now, Daniel is living out this righteous living in a pagan nation. In fact, we read in verse 4 of chapter 6 that the other administrators, who got passed by for the job, began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling his affairs. In other words, they looked to see if he ever lied about something or took a bribe or anything else that they could use to make Daniel look bad. They couldn't find anything. This tells me that these administrators probably did these things and were assuming Daniel did them as well. They couldn't find anything. So, they concluded that the only way to find fault with Daniel was through his religion. So, they get the king to pass a law that no one was allowed to pray to anything except to the king Darius for thirty days and it couldn't be revoked. They were feeding into the king's pride (remember Nebuchadnezzar from last week). Plus, if you were caught, you would be thrown to the lions. Once the king signs this into law, these unrighteous men go to Daniel's house to see what he does. Let's read again this part of the story starting at verse 10 of Daniel 6, "But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God. The officials went together to



Daniel's house and found him praying and asking for God's help. So they went back to the king and reminded him about his law (NLT)." Daniel hears about this new law and he still goes to his house and prays to God with the window open like he always had done. We see here the perfect example of God's righteousness living through a person. Daniel had a choice to make. All Daniel had to do was close the window and pull down the shade or he could have gone to a room where there was no window. He could have still prayed to God, but he could have done it in hiding. Daniel made his choice, even knowing that he could die for that choice. He chose righteous living. Our human nature would tell us to take the easy way and hide somewhere and pray. It's only for thirty days. I like this from a commentary, "What would have been the headlines in the Babylonian newspapers the day of Daniel's arrest? How accurate would they have been? Would he have been described as a villain or a victim? A major trial during persecution is the implied guilt fostered on the victim. In Daniel's case, an everyday spiritual discipline had become twisted into something treasonous. An act so appropriate and innocent a few days before was now a perversion. Daniel, the official who was previously considered above reproach, was now indicted (Wesley Bible Curriculum)." Daniel didn't buckle under the pressure of the culture.

Then we know that the king has no choice, but to throw Daniel into the lion's den. The king is upset because he knows he has been fooled and there is nothing he can do without causing dishonor to himself – pride issue again. So, he has a stone placed at the entrance of the den and it's sealed. The next morning, the king hurried to the den to see if Daniel is still alive and to see if God had saved Daniel from a great injustice. Daniel makes an interesting statement in verse 22, "My God sent his angel to shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in His sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty (NLT)". Daniel was more worried about God's judgment than the human king's judgment. God had found Daniel innocent and God saved Daniel that day. We have to make sure we follow the example of Daniel here. Daniel was more concerned about living out God's righteousness than pleasing the culture and the human king. We need more church leaders today that have the character of Daniel.

There is something we have to remember – for every Daniel there is a Stephen. We read about Stephen in Acts 6 where 7 men are chosen to help ease the load of work that is upon the disciples. Scripture tells us in Acts 6: 3 and 5 that Stephen is a man of good repute, full of faith, and full of the Holy Spirit. In other words, Stephen is living a holy life that we are all called to live through the Holy Spirit. Stephen started to do great wonders and signs because he was filled with the power of the Spirit of God. Some men from a synagogue decided to make up false claims about Stephen saying blasphemous words against Moses and God. They were attacking Stephen's religion like the men

against Daniel did. Stephen was brought up in front of the Temple council and Stephen had a choice to make. We don't have time to read Stephen's sermon to the council, but Stephen didn't buckle under the pressure. Stephen states this at the end of his testimony, "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it. (ESV)." So, because Stephen spoke the truth through the Holy Spirit, Stephen was stoned to death, but not before seeing the heavens open up in front of him and he sees Jesus standing by the right hand of God. My opinion is that Stephen was able to see a glimpse of heaven before he died because he lived out the Righteousness of God just like Daniel did. I bet Stephen didn't even feel those stones hitting him as he saw this awesome sight that Jesus allowed him to see as he was dying. I don't know what was greater, Daniel being rescued by hunger lions or Stephen seeing heaven as he died. I think I'll side with Stephen. However, either way, both men, Daniel and Stephen, chose to live a righteous life for God and it didn't matter if it offended the culture of their day.

Jesus is looking for people that have the same views as Daniel and Stephen today. John 15: 18 – 25, "<sup>18</sup> "If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. <sup>19</sup> The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. <sup>20</sup> Do you remember what I told you? 'A slave is not greater than the master.' Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you. <sup>21</sup> They will do all this to you because of me, for they have rejected the one who sent me. <sup>22</sup> They would not be guilty if I had not come and spoken to them. But now they have no excuse for their sin. <sup>23</sup> Anyone who hates me also hates my Father. <sup>24</sup> If I hadn't done such miraculous signs among them that no one else could do, they would not be guilty. But as it is, they have seen everything I did, yet they still hate me and my Father. <sup>25</sup> This fulfills what is written in their Scriptures<sup>o</sup>: 'They hated me without cause.'

<sup>26</sup> "But I will send you the Advocate<sup>o</sup>—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me. <sup>27</sup> And you must also testify about me because you have been with me from the beginning of my ministry. (Biblegateway)

Jesus is still looking for righteous men and women who are willing to make the choice to follow Him instead of this world. I hope you have made the right choice.

*The Strongest Strong's Concordance.* Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001

*Wesley Bible Curriculum.* Wesleyan Publishing House: Fishers, 2024