**Stowe Church : Sunday May 7th 2023**

**People of Courage: Daniel**

Today we continue the series looking at people of courage and this week we come to Daniel, in particular the events which we had read to us from Daniel Chapter 6

I want to look at context of the story in Chapter 6, then the story itself and finally what this episode in Daniel’s life might teach us for our faith journey.

**Context**

The book of Daniel is a book of two halves. Chapters 1 – 6 written mainly in Aramaic recount Daniel’s life in the Babylonian Court, chapter 7 –12 written mainly in Hebrew are prophesises about future events including visions of the end times. The book covers the period 605 BC to 537 BC, the time when the Israelites were exiled in Babylon. The Israelites were taken into exile in three waves and it is highly likely Daniel would have been in the first wave in 605 along with other Israelites from the royal family and nobility to serve in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian ruler

When Babylon took the Israelites into captivity, some of them may well have been in shock that their God had not prevailed. The God who had rescued them from Egypt had not delivered Jerusalem from Nebuchadnezzar’s armies! How could that be?

The Israelites prophets had warned that God would withdraw His protection from His people if they continued to ignore His laws yet the children of Israel stubbornly persisted in their sins. The Israelites went into captivity not because God was powerless before the armies of Babylon, but because of their sins.

Daniel, who was a teenager when he first arrived in Babylon, has to learn how to live in exile, to continue to live out his faith in God living in an alien land surrounded by a people that worshipped false gods and in a very different culture. How could he serve God separated from the Promised Land and without a temple? This was his challenge. So let’s look at Chapter 6

**Chapter 6**

As we enter Chapter 6 Daniel is now in his eighties and Darius is shown as the new ruler of Babylon. Some scholars think that Darius is meant to be Cyrus and Babylon is now in the Persian Empire but we will leave that debate to the scholars . Daniel had established a reputation in Babylon as a man of wisdom and integrity and an interpreter of dreams .Such was his reputation that Darius had given him a significant role in the government of his country. He was one of three chief ministers overseeing the 120 satraps or regional governors. Darius was so concerned about corruption amongst these satraps that he appointed men he trusted to oversee them.

Such was Daniel’s character and qualities that Darius eventually decided to set him over the whole Kingdom. What was so special about Daniel? We are told in:

* verse 3 Daniel had exceptional qualities
* verse 4 there no corruption in him
* verse 4 he was completely trustworthy

Daniel was courageously living out his life according to God’s ways even in this alien country. He had not been drawn into a different lifestyle just to fit in.

This led to jealousy and anger amongst the other chief ministers and the Satraps. Daniel was not one of them; he as a foreigner, a Jew. And they set out to bring Daniel down

They skilfully persuaded Darius to issue and Edict

6So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: “May King Darius live forever!  You should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. 8Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” 9So King Darius put the decree in writing.

Notice how they pandered to Darius’s ego, surely he was the most important person in the Empire. They succeeded and the decree was written. They knew that Daniel would do what he always did and would pray.

And Daniel when he realised what they had done went home to pray to God. This was part of his life, a discipline he maintained throughout his life

He went to his room opened his window facing Jerusalem and the Temple. This was so important and we need to look at a passage from 1 Kings to understand what was happening here. This is part of Solomon’s prayer to God at dedication of the Temple in 960 BC some 400 years earlier

46“When they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you become angry with them and give them over to their enemies, who take them captive to their own lands, far away or near; 47and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors and say, ‘We have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly’; 48and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who took them captive, and pray to you toward the land you gave their ancestors, toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name; 49then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause. .

Daniel living this out, facing Jerusalem and the Temple he prayed to God to uphold his cause

The conspirators report Daniel to Darius who was distressed when he realised the implications of the edict but had no choice other than to commit Daniel to the den lions

Darius spent a restless night and next morning went to see if Daniels’ God had somehow recued him. Daniel tells the King an angel had been sent to protect him because he was innocent . Darius was overjoyed. Daniel was unharmed, why? Because he trusted in God.

The outcome another decree from Darius and what a decree it was

“I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

“For he is the living God
    and he endures forever;
his kingdom will not be destroyed,
    his dominion will never end.
27He rescues and he saves;
    he performs signs and wonders
    in the heavens and on the earth.
He has rescued Daniel
    from the power of the lions.”

**Application**

Three thoughts stuck out to me from the story

Firstly did you notice the similarities with this event and the death and resurrection of Jesus

The established leaders were threatened by Jesus , similar to Daniel and plotted to bring about his death. This involved trapping Darius and Pilate into making a decision they did not want to make and so condemning two innocent men to death. But both came from behind the rolled stone alive

Both were obedient to God and had that trust in Him that even when in the shadow of death they trusted their God.

The psalm we read this morning sums this up

 1The Lord is my light and my salvation—
    whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
    of whom shall I be afraid?

2When the wicked advance against me
    to devour[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+27%3A1-5&version=NIV#fen-NIV-14288a)] me,
it is my enemies and my foes
    who will stumble and fall.
3Though an army besiege me,
    my heart will not fear;

.
5For in the day of trouble
    he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
    and set me high upon a rock.

As we reflect on this story we need to think again about having that trust in God our Father for our salvation. It was because Jesus trusted and obeyed his heavenly Father that he went to the cross but rose again. That wonderful old chorus, Trust and Obey. Daniel lived that out in his life. Even when faced with his enemies and the den of lions .What about us ? Can we live a life of trust an obedience even in difficult times

Secondly I see Daniel as a man in his eighties still witnessing to God and being faithful to God in prayer. Psalm 92 verse 14 is a great verse of encouragement to us as we grow older as the Psalmist speaks to those whose trust is in the Lord .

Even in old age they will still produce fruit, they will remain vital and green. They will declare the Lord is my rock.

We are never too old show our faith even in the smallest of ways day by day and certainly never too old to pray. Throughout the Bible we are encouraged to pray to the Lord. He delights in our prayers. Faith, trust and prayer go hand in hand in our daily walk with the Lord. .

Thirdly Daniel lived in an alien land, an alien culture and worked at the very heart of that country.

Jeremiah spoke these words before the exile

Seek the peace and prosperity (wellbeing) of the city to which I will carry you in exile for if it propers you will proper “

Throughout the story of Daniel we see that though the Israelites were in exile God had not deserted them, the miracles and prophecies that Daniel experienced demonstrated that.

But he was able to not only to prosper but give witness to his God by the way he lived out his faith. Think how Daniel’s faith saw that amazing edict issued

 We too are in an alien land surrounded by an alien culture.

Like Daniel we must not be tempted to be swayed by the culture we live in rather we courageously live our lives according to God’s ways. By living out our faith in whatever way we can in the hope it will help others to come to know love the Lord.

So three faith challenges from Daniel, for our daily walk :

To trust and obey

To have faith and pray

To live courageously following God’s ways