

Sermon—January 8-9, 2000
Rich Nathan
Daniel: Thriving in a Hostile World
Daniel 6

A Profile in Courage: Daniel in the Lion's Den

Courage is the ability to choose God and do what is right even when you are afraid, alone, outnumbered or face overwhelming odds against success.

Well, today, we are going to read one of those enormously popular children's stories. In fact, this story is popular for people of any age. It is the story of Daniel in the Lion's Den.

Let me begin by telling you another story, a story which most of you are familiar with. It is a story of an awakening, a spiritual renewal that has taken place in Littleton, Colorado. All of you know that on April 20, 1999, at about 11:20 in the morning, two teenage boys, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, walked into Columbine High School in suburban Littleton, Colorado, armed with pipe bombs and at least 7 guns. After killing a student on the lawn and another in the hallway, they moved into the library where they murdered 10 more of their classmates and a teacher before killing themselves.

Several students were shot just because they were popular. Two were killed because they were athletes. Isaiah Shoels was singled out for murder because he was an African-American. 17 year old Rachel Scott was killed, apparently, because she had a Bible and the boys taunted her. They shot her in the leg first and said to her, "Go, be with him now" before killing Rachel Scott. They mocked 18 year old Valeen Schnur for believing

in Christ. When she told them that they could stop killing, if they, too, believed, they left Valeen Schnur with permanent nerve damage from nine wounds. 17 year old Kascey Ruegsegger survived after being shot in the face and her shoulder just for being a Christian believer.

And then, at last, they reached a girl that many have you have heard about – a girl named Cassie Bernall. Apparently, Cassie was raised in a strong Christian family. But she was a rebel. When she was younger in Junior High, according to her parents, she dabbled in witchcraft and used alcohol and drugs. Some of her friends and family members said that she used to engage in animal sacrifices. Her youth pastor thought that she was beyond help. He said there are some kids you meet that you think there is a chance with and then there are other kids where you say, “She’s gone. She’s just out there.” Her youth pastor said, “I never gave Cassie a hope. She was disconnected. She didn’t listen to anything or anyone. She was into black magic, dark stuff.”

Well, after her parents discovered some letters in her room, they pulled their daughter out of school and sent her to a Christian school. They sent her on an intense weekend retreat and prohibited her from doing anything outside of her house other than to go to church. Her father said, “It is hard because you never know if you are going to drive your kid further away into rebellion when you take a hard line or whether you are going to reel them back in.”

But one day Cassie came back and she had become a believer. Her father said that it was like she was in this dark room and someone turned on the lights for her. Cassie, herself, said, “I went to this church camp and a bunch of people prayed around me. I don’t know what happened, but I just felt changed. This big burden that was on my heart just lifted off.” She wrote to one of her friends after her conversion. In kind of a teenagerish enthusiasm that was so sweet she wrote, “Isn’t it amazing this plan that we are a part of? I mean, it is a pretty big thing to be part of God’s plan. Honestly, I want to live completely for God. It is hard and scary, but it is totally worth it to me to live completely for God.”

Well, either Eric Harris or Dylan Klebold - the other students were crouched down and couldn’t see who it was, but they saw a gun being put to Cassie Bernall’s head in the library at Columbine High School. And they heard a question being asked of her: Do you believe in God? She paused for a second, according to her classmates, and then she answered, “yes.” Her Bible study friend, Joshua Lapp, said that she was scared, but that she sounded really strong, like she knew what she was going to answer.

Staring at her, the gunman said, “Why?” And before she could reply, he pulled the trigger and shot her through her temple killing her instantly.

Cassie Bernall’s story has been written by her parents in a book that we have sold out of in the bookstore, but we will have a bunch of copies next week. It is called, “She Said

Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall.” It would be a great book to get for your teenager. It is a great book for many of you to read.

Now, this morning, as we look at the story of Daniel in the Lion’s Den, I want to talk about one of those neglected virtues in contemporary American life. It is frankly a virtue that is also neglected in the Christian church. I am going to talk about courage. America is so good at celebrating rebellion and outrageousness – whether we are talking about the cartoon South Park or the latest antics of Puff Daddy or Dennis Rodman. What is celebrated in America right now is being outrageous, breaking conventions, in-your-face kinds of attitudes. You don’t hear too many people talking about courage.

But you know, it is unlikely that many of us here are ever going to be in Cassie Bernall’s situation – life or death, do you believe in Jesus Christ? We have Christian brothers and sisters around the world who face that very question every day. Tens of thousands of Sudanese Christians have been murdered or enslaved by Muslims in Northern Sudan simply because they are Christians.

Most of us are not going to be placed in a lion’s den. But I can go around this congregation and point out example after example of genuine Christian courage that deserves to be celebrated and talked about and held up as models for us. I think of a woman in our congregation who chose against the advice of her doctors and her friends and her sister and family to not abort a baby that she was carrying that she knew was going to be severely handicapped and, short of a miracle, would ultimately die. It takes

courage in today's society to not abort handicapped children, or to not abort when you are an unmarried woman.

I think of a woman in our congregation who gave her baby up for adoption because she believed that her baby would have a better life in a two parent family than in the life she could provide. It takes enormous courage to bear a child and then give that child to another couple. And to go to court and sign papers where you give up your right to your own child because you love him or her so much that you want to give them a life that you can't provide.

When I think of courage, I think of a number of people here who have come out of the shadows, come out of hiding, regarding a significant problem or addiction in their life that in some cases has been going on for 20,30 or 40 years. It takes courage to admit that you are an alcoholic and you don't have power over your drinking or your drug problem or your problem with pornography. It is so easy to remain in hiding. That is what most people do. I know several people who confessed affairs to their spouse because they couldn't stand to have a dark secret kept from their mate.

It takes courage, as I see in many, many couples, to admit that their marriage is not doing well and to seek counseling. It takes courage to stand up to an abuser, as some of you have done. It takes courage to leave a big money job and the security of a healthy salary and benefits to take a lower paid, more insecure job that you believe is going to help more people or serve God better.

It takes courage to leave America and become a missionary. It takes courage to stay in a difficult marriage, married to an alcoholic or to someone who simply is unable or unwilling to return the love that you so desperately want to give and share. It takes courage to daily care for someone who is sick or disabled – a spouse, child or parent, without quitting and turning the entire job over to someone else. It takes courage to confess.

Let me give you my definition of courage. I didn't read this somewhere else. But as I think about all of the situations that we find ourselves in, and as I look at the text that we are going to be examining today, here is my definition of courage: Courage is the ability to choose God and do what is right even when you are afraid, alone, outnumbered, or face overwhelming odds against success.

Let me say that again. Courage is the ability to choose God and do what is right even when you are afraid, alone, outnumbered, or face overwhelming odds against success.

About 40 years ago a young man who was running for President named John Kennedy wrote a book called *Profiles in Courage*. He, himself, had had some pretty harrowing experiences aboard a PT boat that was torpedoed during World War II. Today, we are going to take a look at a profile in courage—one of the most famous of all time. We are going to take a look at Daniel in the Lion's Den. Let's pray.

Let's begin by reading Daniel 6.

“It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps [princes] to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.”

Let me give you a bit of background to Daniel 6 and what is going on here with King Darius. You might recall that Daniel is in Babylon. His country was overrun by the Babylonians in successive waves of invasion. When Daniel was a teenager, he was taken, along with tens of thousands of other Jews, from the land of Judah back to Babylon, which today would be in modern Iraq. At the time of the original invasion of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar was the king. He was succeeded by his son and then grandson, Belshazzar.

Now here we are in Daniel 6, a new king and a new empire. It is no longer the Babylonian Empire, but the Empire of the Persians. And Daniel is still in Babylon. He is being promoted again because of his exceptional qualities. Let's read vv. 4-9.

“At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, ‘We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel

unless it has something to do with the law of his God.’ So the administrators and the satraps went as a group 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. Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.’ So King Darius put the decree in writing.”

So this is what the administrators say: “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.”

Now, I don’t know if you recall from the time you were small and raised in a church, but remember those pictures of Daniel in the lions’ den? There is this ruddy faced teenager surrounded by hungry lions. Now all of those paintings and all of those pictures of Daniel in the lions’ den suggest to me that the painters never had actually opened the Bible to read the account because Daniel, when he was thrown into the lions’ den, was no ruddy faced teenager. He was, at the time of Daniel 6, about 90 years old. He came to Babylon as a child and lived in this foreign country as an exile for over 80 years. It was like being born sometime during WWI, near the beginning of the 20th Century, and now here it is the 21st Century. And his life dream of returning to his home and living in a

free homeland that isn't ruled by the Babylonians or Persians, but that Jews would have their own home, his life dream is still unfulfilled.

But I think it is really important for us to reflect on Daniel's age when the events of this chapter take place because we often think of courage as something that is exercised by the young and the healthy. You know, it is the young, healthy soldier who, in an almost carefree way, throws himself on top of a grenade in order to protect and save the lives of his buddies. It is the young fireman who rushes into a building to save a family of strangers because that's his job. It is a young policeman who walks into the middle of a domestic quarrel, when someone might have a gun, because he wants to protect a wife or a child from abuse or violence.

But Daniel, here, is almost 90 years old. And the paintings of Daniel in the lions' den ought to show a very old man bent over, perhaps slightly hard of hearing, his vision dimmed because he has no glasses, maybe he is gumming most of his food. He is a man who needs to take naps in the afternoon and who goes to sleep at 8:30 in the evening.

I think it is helpful to consider Daniel's age in relationship to this issue of courage, because we usually think of old age as a time to take it easy, as a time to rest on your laurels and your achievements. And we must recognize that the Christian life is always meant to be a challenge. You never come to a place as a Christian of just coasting. In fact, if you are in the place right now of just coasting on what you used to know or experience, you are almost certainly moving backward in the Lord and not forward.

Jesus Christ exercises a continual demand upon his followers to stretch, to risk, to do what is right even when you are afraid, alone, outnumbered or you face overwhelming odds against success. It is not like, “I’m a little bit older now, therefore God demands less of me.” Somehow there is this myth that circulates in Christianity that being passionate for God and really taking a stand is something that is for people in their 20’s. Being white hot alive for God is for young adults and teenagers. But I have a house and a mortgage, a retirement account, a real job.

Here is Daniel at age 90 still challenged by God. Daniel, what are you going to do now? How are you going to meet this test? The test of failing health? The test of losing a spouse? The test of aloneness? The test of financial difficulties? How are you going to meet these tests? With fear controlling you?

There was a study done by a Fuller Seminary Professor, a guy who specializes in the area of leadership development. It was a study done by Robert Clinton about leaders in the Bible. According to his count, he discovered that four out of five leaders in the Bible finished their lives poorly. It is, in other words, the rare person who gets into old age and is still warmly intimate with God. It is the rare person who can be a life long learner, who can remain teachable in their 40’s, 50’s, 60’s and 70’s – who haven’t come to a place of knowing it all, experiencing it all, but can still say to God, in old age or middle age, “I want a fresh experience of you today, God. Thanks for what you did 5, 10, 20, 40 years ago. But today you are calling me to take a step of faith.”

When I think of courage, I think of someone like Corrie ten Boom. Many of you are familiar with Corrie ten Boom from her autobiography, *The Hiding Place*. She and her family were Dutch and hid Jews during the war until they were discovered by the Nazis. Her family was rounded up and thrown in a concentration camp. She lost everyone—her sister, her father. There is a wonderful statement in her book, *The Hiding Place*, where through a clerical error she was released from the concentration camp near the end of World War II. She said, “God, I want some way to make a difference in this world, to ensure that I and my family have not suffered in vain.” But then this thought comes into her mind, “But here I am, an old maid, [she says. She is in her mid-50’s, single, she says] God, what can you do with an old maid?”

I wouldn’t use that terminology, old maid, but Corrie ten Boom said that of herself. And God took that old maid and gave her nearly 40 more years of life. He took her to over 67 countries and had her minister to millions of people.

I wonder how many of you have the courage to say what Corrie ten Boom said. God, I want to make a difference. I want my life to count for something. I don’t want to spend my life working on my house, playing golf, collecting little things, just climbing the corporate ladder.

Let me ask you a personal question and then we are going to move on. It has always occurred to me that as I have met older people that they have become exactly what they have always been like, only more so. The facades are pulled away and you see people

become more self-centered, more critical in old age, more self-pitying, more anxious, more fearful, less capable of intimate relationships or more delightful, more free of the fear of man, more generous, more encouraging, more courageous. What direction are you going in? Are you growing in your ability to choose for God and do what is right, even when you are afraid?

Daniel enjoyed quite a reputation as an old man in Babylon. It said in v. 3 that he “so distinguished himself among the administrators and satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of governmental affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally, these men said, ‘We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.’”

You know, the early chapters of Daniel are filled with jealousy, conflicts, in-fighting and conspiracy. For three quarters of a century Daniel is attacked simply because of the grace that God set on his life. People are jealous of the favor that rests on Daniel. Ultimately, they are angry because of his profound godliness.

There is a strong element of this that you can see in many workplaces and in many families and classrooms where someone, for no apparent reason, is upset with you or really angry simply because you are a Christian. You haven’t done anything wrong, you

are just being you. You are happy. You are pleasant. You smile a lot. You are loving. You are cheerful. You tell the truth. You put in a hard day's work and you don't goof off. You don't pad your expense account. You don't go out and get drunk. You are actually nice. And if you display Christian qualities of being loving, joyful, truthful, hardworking, there is going to be – I guarantee it – some people around you who will say, “I can't stand you. I can't stand her. She is so annoying. She is always so cheerful.” Or “I can't stand him. He is so stuck up.” And he is not stuck up at all. He is just a guy with great integrity who doesn't compromise all the time. He doesn't lie his way out of every difficulty.

Well, what is going on with this enormous revulsion and anger toward those with good character? Why does the media always portray people with good character as being despicable? Because Daniel 6 will be replayed in the life of every true Christian, since deep down in every human heart there is a profound resentment against God, a revulsion against the things of God, an opposition against the truth of God, a love of darkness rather than life. There will be times in your life, friend, if you are a Christian, that you will be hated for no reason other than that you are a follower of Christ.

I love the fact that others in the government have to manufacture faults to accuse Daniel of. Because it says that in his administration, in his responsibility, he was faultless. They could find no corruption in him. He was trustworthy. He was neither corrupt nor negligent.

And you know, this is the place you want to live. Wouldn't it be nice if the problems that you had with other people were the result of their pettiness, of their envy of you, of their jealousy, of their anger toward God, and not because of your bad work habits, or your character flaws, or your gossip. The Bible, in 1 Peter 4, tells us to examine why we are suffering. It says to us, "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler."

In other words, if you are in the workplace and you are getting hassled, you need to consider why you are being hassled at school by your teacher. Is it because of poor reviews or sloppy work habits? Because you show up late or miss days? Because you are not productive or lack focus? Because you have a poor attitude? Or is it because you are following God?

Let me proceed with this thought a little bit because I don't think that the Christian church, in general, or para-church organizations - whether Campus Crusade, or The Navigators, Youth With A Mission or any Christian book - stress enough the idea that following Jesus Christ and being a disciple is not just a matter of multiplying spiritual activities like witnessing, fellowship, or prayer. It involves those things, but it also involves doing an excellent job at work – working with diligence, working with honesty, studying hard. For some of us it is the easiest thing in the world to attend another fellowship group, to hang out with your friends. But to sit with an open book and study calculus when everyone else is downstairs singing, to be on-call at the hospital, to be

loving on a late night shift as a nurse to a really unpleasant, inconsiderate patient, to respond kindly to an unpleasant, inconsiderate customer in your department store – those are some of the best tests of Christian discipleship. How are you doing out there, away from church? That is where the rubber meets the road.

And I will tell you, it often takes more courage to choose for God and do what is right in the workplace, where standards of integrity and honesty and hard work are abysmally low. Or in school where standards are so low. It takes courage to do your own work and not plagiarize, even though everyone else is doing it. It takes courage to refuse to download a term paper off of the internet, even if it means you get a lower grade. To choose God and do what is right is not just about religious things. It is about the whole of life.

Well, how did Daniel gain this courage? Look what it says in vv. 10-11. “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.”

Courage is not a matter of immediate inspiration. Well, faced with a really difficult problem, faced with overwhelming opposition, I hope that something will just come over me. I will, in the moment, be struck by some bolt of lightening and become courageous. Courage under fire is learned through the continual habit of choosing God and doing what is right even when you are afraid, alone, outnumbered, or face overwhelming odds

against success. For 90 years, Daniel has been choosing God. From day one, when he got to Babylon, back in Daniel 1, Daniel committed himself to not become a Babylonian. He said to himself, “I am going to live here. I am going to work here. I may die here. But I am never going to become one of them.” And I love v. 10 where it says, “He went home to his upstairs rooms where the windows opened toward Jerusalem.” Daniel’s heart was always oriented towards Jerusalem. Never toward Babylon, always toward Jerusalem, toward God’s place. He made a lifetime habit of orienting his heart toward God. Daniel’s heart had never been oriented toward Babylon.

Let me ask you a personal question: what is your heart oriented toward? Where is your treasure? What do you fantasize about? What, for you, would be your greatest joy, your greatest success, the fulfillment of your day dreams? Courage is the result of the habits of the heart – the inner choices that you make regarding what you choose to think about and aim yourself toward.

And so, on the day of severe test, what does he do? He does what he has always done. Three times a day he prayed. He did that last week, he did it last year, he did it ten years ago, he’s going to do it today. He is not flaunting his spirituality, but he is not hiding it either. That is a big tightrope to walk – where you don’t flaunt your spirituality – in your face, wearing some gigantic cross, covering the walls of your office with all kinds of spiritual sayings, leaving a tract for a waitress instead of a tip. Waitresses really appreciate that from Christians. They love to get a religious tract rather than a big tip.

Let me tell you a little story here. There is a woman named Elizabeth Elliott whom some of you are familiar with from her books and writings about her missionary husband Jim Elliott, who was murdered as a very young man back in the 1950's by the Aucha Indians. Some of you may be familiar with Elizabeth Elliott's book, *Passion for Purity*, a wonderful book on sexual purity. It is great for any single person, or really any married person to read.

Well Elizabeth Elliott once wrote about her childhood. She wrote that her father worked in the coal mines. It was during the depression. It was 1935 and there were seven kids in the family. They were very poor. And then Dad got sick and he died. Elizabeth Elliott talks about the day of Dad's funeral. She said, "It was raining and we were poor. And the only source of our family income or security was now dead." She said that her mother trudged off to the cemetery in the mud with seven little ones following. There were no men at the funeral because all the men had to work or they would lose their jobs, so there were only a few women who joined her mother. She said for three days her mother didn't speak a word. She was so overcome by grief. Elizabeth Elliott, as a young girl, believed life was over.

She said on the fourth day she was awakened by a whisk-whisk sound. What was that sound? Whisk-whisk. She got up and she saw her mother up, her hair combed, her apron on, and her mom was sweeping the floor. She said that sound, whisk-whisk, and watching her mother sweep the kitchen floor, she knew life was going to go on. Mom

was choosing to do her duty. Maybe I can't figure it all out, but I can do what is set before me and take the next step out of bed today. Comb your hair and do what is right.

I don't think Daniel set out to be a hero. But what you see in his life is the effect of a life time of continual faithfulness. Heroism is the accumulation of a lot of choices, each of which is attainable by any one of us. Any one of you can choose tomorrow morning to get out of bed and get on your knees for ten or fifteen minutes and pray, like Daniel. Anyone of you can choose to say, "Tomorrow I am going to open my Bible and read several chapters." Today I am going to make that difficult phone call or write that difficult letter. And the next day I am going to open my Bible again. And the day after that... If you are taking stuff from work, you can choose tomorrow to stop that and to return what you have taken. If you are having sex with your boyfriend or girlfriend, you can choose to say no today. Little habits of faithfulness, one on top of the other.

But you know, courage is not just a natural quality. It was not like Daniel was naturally courageous. It says in v. 11, "These men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help." When you are afraid, alone, when everyone is against you, when you are facing overwhelming odds against success, you can hit your knees like Daniel and ask God for help. Courage is not for the dare devil who just enjoys danger – the Evil Knievels who just love taking their motorcycles out over the Grand Canyon for the sheer thrill of doing something outrageous and crazy. Courage is choosing God, even when you are afraid.

Let me tell you about another woman named Mary Slessor. Mary Slessor was born in Scotland in the middle of the 19th Century. Her mother was a committed Christian and her father was an alcoholic. She grew up in the slums of Dundee, Scotland. She was frequently beaten and thrown out of her house by her drunken father. She was frequently harassed by drunk men who filled the dark city streets where she wandered at night. She was very shy. She had an incredible fear of speaking in public, especially around men, because of what she had suffered.

But she developed this great compassion for those who were suffering like her. And this great compassion spilled over into her heart for Africans, whom she was hearing stories about by returning missionaries. She often imagined herself teaching African children. More and more she got the sense that God was calling her, Mary Slessor, to go to Africa.

Well, at the age of 28, this very timid, single woman boarded a ship that she said was loaded with hundreds of kegs of rum and one single frightened woman bound for Africa. The romance faded when she hit the shore. She said at times her terror was almost out of control. She was afraid to cross the street where there were crowds. She was afraid of speaking in public. She was afraid of riding in a canoe, the only means of travel in the area where she was ministering. She would lie in the bottom of the canoe with her eyes closed and sing loudly just to keep her mind off the terror of drowning.

She was really afraid of animals, and she was in Africa! When she was a girl, she couldn't even cross a field where a cow was because she was afraid of being trampled by

the cows. And God had her in a place where there were snakes and crocodiles. She wrote in her journal, “I did not used to believe the story of Daniel in the lions’ den until I had to take some of these awful marches, and then I knew it was true and that it was written for my comfort. Many a time I walked along praying, ‘O God of Daniel, shut the mouths of these snakes.’”

God used Mary Slessor powerfully. She became known in West Africa as the mother of all people. In Africa, in the 19th Century, families would take twins and murder them because they thought that there was some witchcraft involved in a twin being born. And it became known all over west Africa by mothers that Mary Slessor would care for your twins. Frightened mothers would flee to Mary Slessor’s house where she raised hundreds and hundreds of twins and preached the gospel, eventually, to thousands of men and women.

I love her story, because we see in her that courage is not a natural quality. It is a matter of choosing God, to do what is right, even though you are afraid.

Now the story goes on.

“So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: ‘Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any God or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions’ den?’ The king answered, ‘The decree stands—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.’ Then they said to the king, ‘Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays

no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.’ When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him. Then the men went as a group to the king and said to him, ‘Remember, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.’ 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.’ A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep. At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, ‘Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?’”

I have always loved this part of the story because the king, who was supposed to be all powerful, is up tossing and turning at night wondering what is happening to Daniel, while I picture Daniel, this old man, asleep in the lions’ den. We haven’t the time to cover this point, but by way of reflection and meditation in your own devotional time, let me point out one thing here. The king, I believe, may in this case serve as an illustration of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because the king here is caught between a rock and a hard place. He is caught between his law – where it says, “Remember, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and the Persians no decree or edict that the king issues

can be changed.” He is caught between his law and his desire to rescue and redeem Daniel.

Now, just as a point of reflection for you, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ faced a similar dilemma in saving you and me. Caught, if you will, between his law, which is an unchangeable expression of his holy will, his law which requires perfection, complete obedience, the law, which requires us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, the law which says we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, the law which says that the person who sins must die – caught between his holy law and his compassionate heart, which desires to forgive and to free us from the consequences of breaking his holy law. But unlike this weak king, Darius, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ had a solution to the divine dilemma. Seeing the need to uphold the law and the desire to forgive and show mercy, God our Father sent forth his son, Jesus Christ, to take on himself the penalty of the broken law and to offer mercy.

And that is what it says in Romans 3:25, when the apostle Paul writes: “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished - he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” To uphold his holy law and to show mercy to those who put their faith in Christ.

Courage is not ultimately a matter of grim endurance. God rescued Daniel.

“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.’ The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. At the king’s command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions’ den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land: ‘May you prosper greatly! 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. He 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.’ So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”

It is important to note that his rescue was really the result of God reaching down his hand and shutting the mouths of lions. Because when Daniel’s enemies were thrown into the pit, they were immediately eaten. There is no natural explanation for the rescue, in other words. It is not that the lions Daniel was placed with were old lions and couldn’t bite

down real well or the lions had been drugged. It wasn't as if the lions were vegetarians and didn't have a taste for people.

The fact is that the God whom Daniel served rescued him. He is the living God and he endures forever. His kingdom will not be destroyed and his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves. And you know, he continues to rescue and save. God continues to intervene in people's lives, to rescue them from their enemies, to give them victory over the forces that oppose them, to help them to conquer their fears.

Let me finish with this. Fanny Crosby was a woman who was blind from six weeks of age because of mistreatment by someone who claimed to be a physician. But she was a woman of great courage and she wrote more hymns and spiritual songs than I believe anyone in the history of the Christian church – 9,000 in all. If you open any old hymnal, you will see more hymns by Fanny Crosby than anyone else. She once was asked if she was bitter because of her blindness. She said: “Even if I was offered the gift of sight I would turn it down. Being blind has freed me from so many distractions so that I can concentrate on worshiping God.”

She wrote one hymn in particular that to me whispers the secret of having the ability to choose God and do what is right even when you are afraid, alone, outnumbered or facing overwhelming odds against your success. It is called “All the Way My Savior Leads Me.” Listen to this:

All the way my Savior leads me
What have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt his tender mercy
Who through life has been my guide?
Heavenly peace, divinest comfort,
Here by faith in him to dwell!
For I know whatever befall me,
Jesus doeth all things well.
All the way my Savior leads me
Cheers each winding path I tread,
Gives me grace for every trial,
Feeds me with the living bread.
Though my weary steps may falter,
And my soul athirst may be,
Gushing from the rock before me,
Lo! A spring of joy I see.

Amen.