

Sermon on Daniel 6:10-12, 16-23 for Reformation 11.5.17

“Trust in God and Live.”

- Pastor Scharf –

Do you ever feel that by following God’s will and commands, he is hanging you out to dry? Is he setting you up for failure, hurt or worse? Take a note from Daniel. Daniel served as an administrator under Darius I. At 62 years of age when Darius marched into Babylon to rule it, he was not just a king and this was not just a kingdom. Darius was the king and this was the kingdom of its day. Darius was going to promote Daniel and set him above the whole kingdom. But Daniel’s fellow satraps and administrators were extremely jealous and plotted, planned and set to work to bring down Daniel. It was difficult since Daniel 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.”* They cold-heartedly appealed to the King’s pride and tricked him into signing a flattering law against worshipping anyone except King Darius for a whole month. The King put the decree into writing. What would you/could you do in such a situation? If you pray to God, it would mean certain death! What did Daniel do?

“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. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. 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 human being except you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions’ den?” The king answered, “The decree stands – in accordance with the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

Darius was the third King Daniel served, and this was the third time he’d risen to the top, and now another challenge in his life to follow or not to follow God’s will. It wasn’t just his popularity, his comfort zone, his possessions, a promotion, or even his livelihood in the balance, it was his own skin – and the possibility of dying a horrible and terrifying death being ripped apart by hungry lions. Does Daniel complain? Does he fight it? Does he make sure to set the record straight and get the last word? Does he blame God for putting him in such a tough spot or chide him for his carelessness with his life? No. Daniel is escorted into the lion’s den, and a stone is rolled over the mouth of the cave. How could

he do anything else but hold to what his God had told him to do and had promised him? The LORD was in control. And Daniel entered the lion's den.

A relative – a sibling, a child or grandchild, or even a grandparent enters into some sin or sinful relationship and puts you in a tough spot to either speak the truth in love to them about their sin and sinful relationship with a warning and also God's forgiveness or to instead keep your mouth shut and ignore God's will and keep some semblance of peace in hopes that it might get better one day. Your friends are trading sultry stories of sin or gangrene gossip and they are looking for your approving laugh and wink and hinge head and taking God's name in vain – "Oh my...", or do you communicate with words, actions or your lack of presence that it just isn't appropriate? Or maybe it's you – you are afraid, too lazy, too weak, or too proud to make any effort to change. In these situations and temptations, recognize what the devil is doing – he wants you to feel like you are helpless, like God hung you out to dry, and you will only find hurt, pain, loneliness and loss if you follow God's will in these situations. Feel helpless. Feel angry. Feel weak. Feel passed over by God's providence. Feel like the only way you can survive is if you take the devil's way, not God's will – keep silent, join in, get revenge, just stay.

Martin Luther knew God's Law. He knew it well. You can see that in his writing of the Large Catechism in his explanations of the commandments. He knew how the law was kept among us and how it is so largely broken among us. He grew up in great awe of God and terrifying fear of death and facing such a just and holy God who would send him to hell for his sins. He knew his sins and he knew that he was accountable to God for them. No amount of good works – his own or others' on his behalf, no idea of indulgences could save him, nor worship services, nor prayers, nor church people, nor purgatory, nor soul scrubbing could save him. There was nothing good in him, that is, in his sinful nature. He knew it. We know it too. Our sins, Our cop-outs, Our failures to witness to the truth so we could save our own skin, our staying away from God's Word because we don't want to find out what it says or what God wants because it will illuminate the dark corners of our lives and we don't want to deal with the sin and the shame. And so we feel helpless. We feel ashamed. Or we feel angry and victims of God's injustice. Why isn't life better or easier? We followed God's will that one time or for a long time and look where it's gotten us? Psshhhh! Martin Luther was both fearful of and angry at God in his early life.

As Martin Luther prepared his lectures on the Psalms and then on Paul's letter to the Romans, he learned something that Daniel knew full well which

sustained him as he walked into the Lion's Den and something we know but the devil often blinds us to, encourages apathy toward and wants us to forget. What is that something? Martin Luther found it and every Christian finds it in *Romans 1:16-17* "*I am not ashamed of the gospel.....*" God is a just judge and will punish the wrong doer. But he also shows us in an amazing act of mercy and his justice that he is also the one who justifies and forgives the sinner. He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to be the perfect substitute for us sinners and also the sin-bearer. Jesus was crucified and suffered on that cross God's separation and hell for our sins. He died and three days later, by his resurrection from the dead, he took the sting out of death, and opened heaven for all believers. At great cost to him, but full and free for us. A gift of His Grace.

As Martin Luther stood up to challenge the whole idea of these indulgences that we can buy God's grace or approval, the world rose up against him – both church and state. In tumultuous years that followed, Luther's life was constantly threatened. It is the reason he refused to take a wife for so long – why marry if he would soon be dead? Yet how could he help but follow the truth? How could he ignore such a great salvation and plunge once again into the devil's lies that people were listening to whether they came from the people, the government or from within the church itself? He followed the truth come what may – because he knew who it was he followed – Jesus Christ, the Just Judge and Savior of the World, his Savior, the world's only Savior, our Savior.

And so, who do we follow? Who do we listen to? Of whom will we be afraid? The devil who lies/Satan who shames us? No. World powers or peer pressure? No. Loved ones who err or embrace sin? No. Our own sin-saturated reason which always wants to stand over God's Word? Anything that wants to be equal with God's will in our life will inevitably want to overthrow God's will and Word. How can we follow anyone else but him who brings the truth – our salvation- our future – our present, and forgives our past? His will is perfect and good. We will follow him in this sinful world come what may – whether a literal lion's den like Daniel entered, or a metaphorical one made up of colleagues, friends, family, enemies, the world, the erring church or even the devil.

Our God does not hang us out to dry or put us at a disadvantage when we follow his will. We carry his light in the darkness of this world and do not fear the growls and the threats of those in darkness. We follow his path though narrow and sometimes difficult and we weak and often failing. What other viable option is there? Peter answered Jesus, "*Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of everlasting life.*" (John 6:68). Habakkuk lived by faith, though surrounded by

ruins, destruction and death, and he said, *“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights”* (Habakkuk 3:17-19). Paul wrote, *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes...For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”*

“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 the 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?” Daniel answered, “May the 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, Your Majesty.” 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.” We follow the truth and live. Happy Reformation! Amen.