



Reformation Weekend – October 29-30, 2023

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: A Simple Plan

***Daniel 6: 10-12, 16-23 10 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. 11 Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. 12 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 to 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 The king answered, "The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." 16 So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den.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!" 17 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. 18 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. 19 At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. 20 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?" 21 Daniel answered, "May the king live forever! 22 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." 23 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.***

Dear Christian friends, declared innocent by God the Father, because of the saving work of God the Son,

The plan was simple. this outsider, this Jew, and been placed in authority over too many people. This man called Daniel, was getting in too good with King Darius. Now I say his name DARE-ius and you might say dar-EYE-us – either one can be correct. But, for the sake of this sermon I'll just say DAR-ius. So let's continue. There was word on the street that Daniel was soon going to be promoted as the king's right hand man over the entire empire.

Oh, sure, Daniel was trustworthy. He did his job right. But, that was part of the problem. He was TOO trustworthy. He was making the rest of the junior government rulers look bad. And it only made them look worse that this Daniel was only a Hebrew,

someone who was supposed to be one of the exiles, just a slave, about the year 600 BC.

You already know the history of Old Testament Israel, right? Because of the sinful behavior of God's chosen people worshiping false idols despite countless warnings from the prophets, Israel was conquered and carried off into exile as captives, many of whom were never heard from again. However, a handful of the Israelite young men were chosen, based on their intelligence and appearance, to be brought up in the language, literature, and overall culture of the Babylonians first, and later by the Persians. Scripture tells us that Daniel was one of them.

But, now, many of the government satraps and governors felt that Daniel was gaining TOO much power and they were jealous. They didn't just want to take Daniel down a peg or two, they wanted to take him out. So they hatched a plan, a simple plan. Oh, they knew Daniel and his tendencies. They knew he was devout in his service to King Darius. But, they also knew he was MORE devout in his service to the one, True God. So they came up with a plan to make him choose – a plan that they knew would work out in their favor. And you really thought YOU had work problems.

Just before our sermon reading in Daniel chapter 6, we learn how these men secretly came to the king and said with false flattery in the Holy Scriptures: ***May 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 human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den. Now 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.*** No doubt in their minds. Daniel, would soon be dead, a tasty treat for those hungry Lions. Can you imagine? Oh, sure you can.

I mean, you are faithful people. You do your job right as a Christian parent, grandparent, kid, friend and co-worker. Why, you're even listening to this sermon on Reformation Day. But, that's part of the problem, You're TOO faithful. You know, you're really making them look bad. And it only makes them look worse that you're a mere mortal, and not one of them, evil angels, demons with unspeakable power.

How did all this happen? Holy Scripture doesn't tell us all the details. But, sometime between Day 6 of creation, and the chapter 3 of Genesis, where Adam and Eve come face to face with Satan, there was war in heaven. A certain group of evil angels, led by Satan fought against God and the good angels. Their plan wasn't a good one. As a result, Satan and the demons lost and were sentenced by God to eternal damnation.

Now these same demons had to lose their minds when watching Adam & Eve fall into sin. Now think about it. When willfully committing sin, Adam and Eve were rightfully cast out of the perfect Garden of Eden – but then God immediately promised them

forgiveness and salvation in a new perfect home in heaven. Why them? Why grace and mercy for the humans and death and destructions for the demons?

So the demons hatched a plan – a simple plan that is still being carried out to this day. But, of course their plan is a little different from the Persian Satraps and Governors. And your enemies are far more intelligent and therefore far more dangerous.

They don't just use the threat of being devoured by hungry lions to deter you from your devotion to the Triune God. They threaten you where it really hurts. They threaten your minds and emotions. They know that if your children aren't in this hockey club, basketball team or that drama performance, they might miss out on learning the skills to get to the next level. And they like to schedule practices during Wednesday School or Bible Class with tournaments and performances on so many weekends that it's hard to come to worship at St. Paul's.

Or think of this example how Satan works. It's been a long week at work. You finally come home and just want to relax, just for a little while before collapsing into bed – only to do the same thing over again tomorrow. It's good to work hard. You're just putting in overtime to provide for your family. You barely get to see your kids as it is. And do you really want to spend that time, taking them to worship services where they just hear a bunch of dusty Roman history that don't seem to apply to life today? Ever hear that one?

Week after week, Pastor O, you and the others tell us that Jesus loves us and that's great to know. But, I can't write that on my mortgage or rent payment. I mean it's good to know that sinners who repent go to heaven, but that doesn't change my kids' disrespect for me or my broken marriage. It certainly won't cure my mom's cancer or bring my dad back from the dead. Do you feel the lions circling? Are you like me, convicted?

Let's face it. King Darius didn't want Daniel to suffer. And neither do those extra-curricular coaches or bosses want to see our kids go to hell. But, like those Persian satraps and governors, Satan and his henchmen will use any one or any distraction to keep us so busy that we don't have time for God's Word.. Yes, these lions are hungry. They want us to be sent to a pit where they can feast on us forever. They want their evil plan to succeed and sadly, it does for far too many.

The Persian satraps and governors thought their plan worked. They gleefully watched as Daniel was thrown into the pit. Certainly, Mother Nature and the circle of life would do the rest. But, they didn't count on another plan, a BIGGER plan, the ultimate plan that God had for Daniel and has for us.

Scripture tells us just a tiny part of God's plan: **19 At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. 20 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?" 21 Daniel**

**answered, “May the king live forever! 22 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.** God loved Daniel. So this time God saved Daniel from the lions. My brothers and sisters, God loves you too. So God came up with a plan to save us from more than hungry lions, but from the punishment of our sins. The plan was simple. Neither Adam or Eve, nor any of us could follow God’s Law or stay safe from Satan. So God sent His Son Jesus Christ to do it for us. Like the angel God sent to close the mouths of the lions, God sent His Son to take the bite out of Satan and the demons. He took away their power by making us innocent in God’s eyes. He made us innocent by sending Jesus to live a perfect life and sacrifice that perfect life on a cross as the full payment for all the times we’ve failed to be innocent.

Only because of Jesus’, is this Reformation verse true: ***Tho’ devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us; we tremble not we fear no ill; they shall not overpower us. This world’s prince may still, scowl fierce as he will. He can harm us none. He’s judged, the deed is done. One little word can fell him.***

Martin Luther’s Reformation hymn nails down exactly what our Savior has done for us. No matter how many times the devil and his demons may attack us, we only need to remember and recite one little word or phrase: Jesus saves sinners. Jesus saves me.

No doubt their temptations are strong. No doubt we’re in the center of their cross-hairs, their goal is to stop us from hearing the word, stop us from believing the word, stop us from spreading the Word. But, remember how our Reformation hymn ends: ***Do what they will – hate, steal, hurt or kill – though all may be gone, our victory is won; the kingdom’s our’s forever.***

God’s simple plan has worked. And how God shares that plan with us is even more amazing. He puts it in a book called a Bible completely full of true stories of His love in action. He attaches His promises to water, to wheat and wine. And each time the Gospel is shared, we’re brought out of the pit to enjoy a life of purpose now and an eternal life in heaven just waiting for every Christian believer.

This Reformation Sunday, thank God for reminding us that just like God took care of Daniel, He takes care of us every single day. This Reformation Sunday, thank God for the work of Martin Luther, who nailed it, that we are saved by Grace alone, by Faith alone, by Scripture alone. Let nothing stop you from regularly hearing those simple truths, God’s simple plan. Amen.