

# "FACING THE LIONS OF LIFE"

**Text: Daniel 6:20**

**Sermon by the Rev. Arthur Rich November 28, 1965  
First Baptist Church Lakeland, Florida**

The story of Daniel has long been a favorite of mine. Here is a story, which illustrates some tremendous principles we need to learn in our day.

Someone has said that one of the great lessons from Daniel is that religious faith is always the bulwark against tyranny. Daniel faced a situation in which an edict put Darius, the King, above God.

It is never easy to determine the relationship between the individual and his government. Always there may be an uneasy tension between church and state, with no clear dividing line which helps us to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God, the things that are God's. Yet there is one principle that Baptists have lived and died for, and that is the belief that the state is not God, and man's allegiance is first of all to God. We should never forget that the Baptist heritage has, "always maintained that it makes no difference whether a man is a king or a slave, he must be subject to the will of God.

Another lesson we can learn from Daniel is that loyalty to God must be expressed in strong conviction and not in weak compromise. Sometimes I fear that some people would rather be called wicked than intolerant, preferring to be called bad, rather than bigoted. I heard someone say recently, "We must be reasonable and adjust ourselves to changing social environment." What he was trying to say was this, "Social disapproval is more to be feared than God's judgment." It has become popular to give up important principles in the name of being civilized.

But, thank God, for the Daniels of the past who have preserved humanity's chief treasures by remaining firm. Thank God for the men who put principles before profit, God before gain, conviction before compromise. We need to learn again to sing, "Dare to be a Daniel".

Abraham Lincoln once lost a race for the Senate in 1858 because of a speech he made, even against the advice of his political friends. But Lincoln said, "If it is decreed that I go down because of this speech, then let me go down linked to the truth."

Another spiritual lesson we can learn from Daniel is that there are many who still secretly admire those who have convictions. King Darius was caught in the trap of his own foolish decree. Little did he realize that when he signed into law this edict that it would endanger the life of the man he respected - Daniel. The Scripture indicates that when he discovered how his foolish law had endangered the life of Daniel, the king fasted and sorrowed for him. In his own soul, the king knew that Daniel was right. Most of the sorrow he felt was his own personal shame. King Darius was ashamed of himself. People who laugh at men of conviction often have a hollow laugh. Betrayal always pretends to despise faithfulness. One man said of another who was loyal to his convictions, "His faithfulness is stupid, but sublime."

The greatest lesson that I have learned from Daniel is that a man must have a center for life. The picture of Daniel with his windows 'open toward Jerusalem' has always inspired my soul. A man needs a center for life, especially when he is in a foreign land. Unless we keep God at the center of our lives, it is so easy to wander into the wastelands of life. How I wish that our young people who go off to college and to other new areas of life could have a spiritual homeland. If, constantly, they could face their spiritual Jerusalem, their spiritual homeland, even in the midst of a strange land, they would not wander into meaningless far countries.

The question that Darius asked of Daniel, as the king came with sorrow to the Den of the Lions, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" and the reply that Daniel gave, concerning his deliverance, contain spiritual suggestions. Like Daniel, we face the lions of life. Do we believe that our God is able to help us, as we face the lions of life? Let me suggest three of the lions of life that we often face. Our God is able to deliver us as we face them.

## **I. MANY OF US FACE THE LION OF DESPAIR**

There are few of us, who have not, at some time or another, come to face the dark wall of despair. Dr. Robert Ozment tells of sitting with a young couple in the corridor of a large hospital while their doctor was doing his utmost to save the life of their little child. Said the father, "Oh, I don't know what I'll do if my little girl dies. I just could-- not take it." Dr. Ozment answered, "There is no valley in life through which our Lord has not already passed. God never leaves us stranded on the road of life. He helps us through."

As you face the lion of Despair, let me suggest two things.

### **1. Trust in God.**

David faced the Lion of Despair. He felt forsaken. He could see no reason for keeping on in life. He cried out, "Why art thou so far from helping me?" (Psalm 22:1) This was a cry from a disturbed soul. He cannot understand why God, if He has heard his cry, did not at least turn aside to inquire. Then comes a horrible thought - can it be that God is deaf?

At this point, David was about as low in despair as a man can get. The Christian may cry out, "How long?" and still believe. But a man's faith is mighty low when he wonders whether God cannot or will not hear. Such a God ceases to be the God of pity, because the ears of pity are always acute. David almost hit the bottom because he was questioning the existence of the God he claimed to know. Then, David pulled himself together. He reminds himself of the foundation of his faith. "Yet Thou art holy." (v.3) Furthermore, he takes comfort in the fact that "our fathers trusted in Thee, and Thou didst deliver them." (v.4)

I have known some Christians who almost lost their faith in God because God did not answer their prayers as they thought He should answer them. If your faith feels that God must do according to your wisdom. Then that is not faith. but it is egotism at its highest level. Such a faith audaciously implies that you have more wisdom than God.

I confess that I have seen things happen to me, which did not appear to make sense. I cannot yet understand all the suffering and sorrow I see in the lives of some of the greatest saints I know. Yet I believe that God is too wise to make a mistake and too kind to hurt us needlessly. My faith whispers to me and says, "Trust God and walk with Him through the valley. The valley may be dark and long, but He will lead you to the sunrise of a glad new morning."

Trust God with a faith that commits itself to God. As A.B. Evans once said, "Faith is not a sense, or sight, or reason, but taking God at His word." Yes, as you face the Lion of Despair, ask God to help you. The Psalmist said. "In my distress, I called upon Him." When you cry for God's help, he will not fail you, when you are in earnest. The help will come. God can be trusted.

. My second suggestion, as you face the Lion of Despair, is not only to trust God, but also to

### **2. Turn your face upward.**

Dr. Roy Angell tells of the wonderful cowboy Christian who was once asked why he sang as he rode around the herd at night. He indicated that one reason for his singing was that singing seemed to sooth the herd. They seemed to lose their restlessness and would lie down and go to sleep. Then he added, "Sometime ago you read to us out of the 'good book' that the "stars sang".(Job 38:7) I look up at the heavens and I think of the stars as God's cowboys. I do not mean to be irreverent, but I believe the Great Cowboy put them out there at night so that in the darkness we may know that He has not forgotten us. The stars ride the night watch on the human herd too. He put them up there to tell us that His eye is on the sparrow and He cares for you and me."

A famous artist portrayed a man all hunched over, his head down, and his hands on the side of his head. It is titled, "Despair". We need to say, "I will lift up mine eyes un- to the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved."

How we need to turn our face upward. I like the words of Jerome K. Jerome, "Look up, don't look down. When you look down you see so much of yourself, and so little of the things that God has made." He decided one time that he had arthritis when his little finger ached. He went to the library and secured a medical book. By the time he finished the article on arthritis, he was sure that he had the disease in every joint of both hands and in both knees. Scared, he turned the pages until he came to 'leukemia'. As he read, he was sure that he had leukemia. He read all about it. He then turned some pages until he came to 'ulcers'. As he read, he was sure he knew why he had pains in his stomach. He said, "The only thing I found in that book that I didn't have was 'housemaid's knee', and I wondered why I didn't have that." Jerome went to his family doctor and said, "I know you gave me a thorough examination recently and told me that I was physically fit, but let me tell you what I found out about myself in my reading. I told him all that I knew was wrong with me." The doctor replied, "Since you have diagnosed your own case, I am going to give you a prescription. Take it to the drug store and get it filled." then Jerome gave the prescription to the druggist he was perplexed, and scratched his head. "I am sorry, but I don't have any of this on my shelves." He went on, "What your doctor prescribed doesn't come in a bottle. Have you read the prescription?" When Jerome answered in the negative, the druggist handed it back to him, saying, "Read it for yourself." Jerome said, "On the paper I read these words, 'Walk eight miles every day, come home and eat a beefsteak for Supper, and stop reading things you've got no business reading'" That was the time Jerome K. Jerome decided it was dangerous to look down, and he began to look up.

## **II. MANY OF US FACE THE LION OF DEFEAT**

Some people feel defeated because there is emptiness in their lives. Jesus had something to say about an empty life. He told of a man who drove out the devils from the house, cleaned the house, but left it empty. In time, worse devils came to occupy the house. God leaves in every man's life an empty place that He alone can fill. You can leave the place empty, or you can fill it with the wrong things in life, and you will feel defeated. You can stuff your pocketbook with money, but unless you fill your life with worthwhile deeds, your heart will remain empty.

A sense of defeat usually comes when you stop trying. No one is really defeated as long as he keeps trying. As long as you have the fire of desire burning, defeat is only temporary.

As you face the lion of defeat, remember the words of Jude: "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling \_II (Jude 1: 24). God is our strength and support. When you are engaged in God's work, you will never be finally defeated. You belong to God, and He has promised ultimate victory.

In some area of life, you may experience a setback, but you are never really defeated if you walk with Him. Someone has said, "It is far more important to reach your eternal destiny than it is to realize all your worldly dreams. I love the words of the Psalmist, "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand."

## **III. SOONER OR LATER, WE FACE THE LION OF DEATH**

If the Lord tarries, in your pathway one day, will stand the Lion of Death. It may be years from now, or it may be that before today's sun sets, we shall face this lion.

As a Christian, you have nothing to fear. The poet has wisely said, Death's but a path that must be trod, if a man would ever pass to God. --Thomas Parnell.

I mentioned earlier in this message the stars that the Westerner called "God's cowboys". I read a book by Dr. Clarence Benson, who is a member of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, and who is recognized internationally as a great astronomer. He says that a study of the stars will remind you of the startling brevity of life on this earth in contrast with the heavenly bodies which burn for countless ages. Said Dr. Benson, "The earth as we know it, appears to be adapted only to a being who has but a short time to remain on this terrestrial sphere. The curse upon the earth as well as the brevity of life proclaims a startling truth. If life is but a vapor, which appears for a little time and then vanishes away, it is well for man to seek something substantial elsewhere. Children may be pleased with the bubbles they blow, but men who have put away childish things out not to be greatly moved by the things of this brief existence.

Let us be reasonable. God never would have sent His Son into the world to live and die for us, if life were a fragile bubble broken at death. The reason our Lord climbed up Calvary then arose from Joseph's tomb, was to assure us that death is only the door that leads to the Father's House. Our Lord was not joking when He said, "Let not your hearts be troubled. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself."

Bishop Arthur Moore had this to say at his retirement, "God has set the eternal in our hearts. Our Christian faith is never so confident, never so triumphant, as when it proclaims the everlasting life. We march, not toward the setting sun, but toward the light of morning. Death for the one who has made his peace with God means going home-- going home to those who love us most."

I feel that I should underline the words of Arthur Moore, "the one who has made his peace with God". You are not ready to die until you have made your peace with God. Christ died on the Cross to provide such a peace with God.

**Here are simply the steps to this peace:**

- 1. Recognize that you have sinned.** See the ugly stain of sin on your soul.
- 2. Realize that you cannot do anything yourself** to remove these sins. It is not what you can do, but it is what Christ has done for your sins.
- 3. Repent of your sins.** Repentance means to turn from your sins. The word literally means to change your mind about sin. Forsake the old life and put your life under the management of God. You must desire to become a better person in order to truly repent.
- 4. Run back to God.** As you run to your Heavenly Father, you will meet Him running to meet you. His arms of love and forgiveness are extended to you. When you have taken into your life, by faith, the Son of God - the one who was called the Lion of the Tribe of Judah - I guarantee you that you need never fear any of the lions of life that stand in your pathway.