

One of the things that I enjoy the most about preaching through the Bible is to see all the connections all the ways God unfolds his plan of salvation: through promises and covenants, through spirit-filled judges, and prophets, and through dreams and visions – like the ones we heard this morning from the book of Daniel.

God often speaks through dreams and visions, especially during times of persecution and suffering like this period when the people of Judah were exiled to Babylon or in the book of Revelation at the end of the New Testament when God spoke to those who were suffering persecution from Roman emperors.

God is using all of these events and dreams and visions to reveal His power and glory and His plan to rescue His people.

Did you catch that at the end of the video story this morning?  
Did you catch what the story of Daniel in the Lion's den revealed?  
Did you catch that it was a story much larger than the story of God shutting the mouths of lions?

I'll come back to the details of that story in a few minutes, but first I want you to grasp this idea that God is behind the scenes unfolding his plan from Genesis through Revelation.

God's ultimate purpose is revealed again and again through each character and each story.

The Apostle Paul sums up this over-arching truth in Ephesians chapter 1 when he wrote that God's purpose, in the fullness of time, is to unite all things in the one who rescues us, Jesus Christ, things in heaven and things on earth,

That's why there is battle going on.

A spiritual battle, between God, and all the forces that oppose God.

Between God who wants to rescue us, and everything that tears us away or tempts us away from God.

We've seen that battle all through the Old Testament, and now in Chapter 18 we see that battle between the kingdom of Babylon, and God's kingdom.

The questions in the book of Daniel are these:

Who has the real power in this world?

Who demands our obedience?

Who is it who hears our prayers?

And ultimately who will rescue us when everything in this world seems to be going against us?

Because sometimes we feel enormous losses, just like the people of Judah. They had lost everything – their homes, their freedom, their very identity.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not even their real names. They had been taken away from their families while they were still teenagers.

And they had been given Babylonian names, and along with Daniel they had been sent through a Babylonian academy that tried to strip them of their culture, and teach them a new language and to win their allegiance.

When they completed their three years of training King Nebuchadnezzar selected them to become his personal assistants. In just about every category they serve him well.

The king questioned them and found them ten times better than all the magicians and sorcerers in his kingdom. But there is only one thing they refuse to do: worship the pagan gods of Babylon. They held firm to the commandment to worship no other gods.

King Nebuchadnezzar decided to build a huge golden idol – 90 feet tall. But when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow down, the king is infuriated.

You see the battle going on here?  
The powers of this world want to separate us from God.  
God wants to unite us all in the salvation and peace, and joy that are found only in Christ.  
But the world wants us to bow down to so many other things.

And here's where we can draw courage from the faith of these three teenagers. They had a moral compass planted deep within them, They didn't bow down. They put their faith in a God who rescues his people.

Such is their devotion that they reply,  
"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and from your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold."<sup>1</sup>

Just this week I read another story about an American pastor named Saeed Abedini. He was visiting relatives in Iran when he was suddenly arrested by Iranian security forces. For over two years he has been jailed under harsh conditions for not bowing down to the authority of his captors.

And now he is being held as a political prisoner as Iran looks to trade him for favors from the US government. Please pray for him and for his family.

Please pray for his release and pray that he holds on to his faith just as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did.

Because just as God with them in that fiery furnace, God is with Pastor Saeed.  
And just as King Nebuchadnezzar was amazed that “the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed”

I pray that Pastor Saeed’s prison guards, and the Iranian officials will see God’s hand and see God’s power and proclaim like King Nebuchadnezzar, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego” -- the true God who hears his people when they pray and rescues them.

Later in the book of Daniel after Persian empire toppled the Babylonians, King Cyrus or Darius as he is called, comes to power and he also wanted the world to bow down and worship him.

Again a spiritual battle takes place.  
And this time Daniel is at the center of it.  
Daniel had so distinguished himself through his integrity, and his ability to govern wisely, that King Darius had planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

So as we saw on the video the other administrators tried to find charges against Daniel, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, so they cooked up a scheme to get King Darius to issue an edict declaring that anyone who prays to any god or human except King Darius, would be thrown into a lion’s den.

And according to the laws of the Medes and Persians it was an edict that could not be repealed.  
- no two-thirds majority or over-riding of vetoes in those days

But just like his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego Daniel stayed firm in his faith and continued to pray three times a day.

Well as you know, from Lower story perspective, Daniels rivals use this to trap him and have him thrown into the lion’s den.

From a human perspective this is just a story about political intrigue... and plots to gain worldly power. But from God’s perspective, there’s much more going on.  
The king was tricked by his advisers and he didn’t want Daniel to die.

And so after Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den, the King goes back to his palace and couldn’t sleep.  
At dawn he rushes straight to the den, and get this, he calls out to Daniel saying, “Daniel, Daniel, has your God rescued you?”

And Daniel shouts back, “Yes. God sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions.”

King Darius was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den.  
The jealous advisers were not so lucky.

So here’s the question of the day:

How is God using an event like this to move history toward the time when all things in heaven and on earth will be united in the gentle reign of King Jesus?

King Darius knew the answer,

After Daniel was rescued, King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth.

That sounds universal doesn’t it? That’s the Bible’s way of telling us something big is going on here – God is writing through King Darius.

And what did he write?

He wrote to all these nations:

“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.

<sup>27</sup> He rescues and he saves;  
he performs signs and wonders  
in the heavens and on the earth.<sup>2</sup>

Which Kingdom has won the battle?

Which Kingdom has rescued you?

May you entrust your life and everything you do, to the one who came, and died, and rose again... so that we might live in hope, and joy, and peace...forever.  
Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 3: Daniel 3:17-19 (*The Story* p. 210)

<sup>2</sup> Daniel 6:25-27