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Brian Frost

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Far From Home

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Courage Grows Daily

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Daniel 6



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God starts everyone's story at a particular time with particular people in a place we call home. Then subtly, at various times in our life, the foundations under our feet shift and we find ourselves far from our place, far from our people, far from home. Where do we find courage when the foundations shake? How do we live in a new place that feels hostile to our faith? How do we live and thrive when we are far from home?

Well, it's great to see you, Providence family. Welcome home. And if you're a guest with us today, we're really glad that you are here. If you have in your hand a Bible, if you want to turn with me to Daniel 6, we'll be there in just a moment. If you don't have one, there's lots of Bibles in the chairs that are near you. And if you don't have one of your own, please take that home as a gift. We would love for you to have it.

It is really good to see you. Tonight is a prayer and worship night at New Hope Baptist Church. And if that's new news to you, I'm sorry, there's been lots of things that have gone out to the church family and even shared from here, but God has provided us an opportunity and has really put upon our heart as a church family to help churches in our city.

Our city continues to sprawl and so we've been saying, "Lord, there's no way that Providence, that this little footprint here on this space can reach the city. There's so many churches and many of them are hurting, and so we've just been praying, God, if you would allow us to help, we would want to do that."

Well, there's a church called New Hope and it's a church, it's people like you. If you know Christ is your savior and Lord, they're people like you. They're brothers and sisters in Christ, and yet their church is really struggling. And so a few months ago actually just started about an 18-month partnership where we simply want to strengthen their hands in the Lord to encourage them, to pray with them. And tonight to sort of start that, we have a night where we're going to sing and we're going to pray to the Lord and we're going to do it with them.

And I think it's going to be an amazing thing and if you happen to come tonight, and I hope that you will, but if you do, I want to encourage us as a church family before we get there to consider something and perhaps it would help us in thinking of a wise way to interact with the people that are there. Just human nature says that when somebody is asking for help, there's a presupposition perhaps that can sit in that relationship to where those who are coming to help perhaps looks like they have an heir of superiority. And every one of us knows deep down, or not even deep down, is that without Jesus Christ, we are a royal train wreck, okay?

And I'm not just talking about you individually, I mean us collectively, we can make a mess of things. And so the fact that God would give us an opportunity to help another church is grace upon grace, and we want to be able to go into this space not as people who figured anything out other than Jesus rules and lives and calls his people to pray together and love together and reach together, and that's what we want to do. And so let me pray for us now, okay?

Father in heaven, we bow before you and we plead again as we have and we continue to do so not only for New Hope, but for all the churches in our community who are preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Bless them today. Help them to reach people today. Help us as your people in this community to be salt and light,

to be a preservative for the good of our city. And we ask God that you would be gracious to us, you'll be pleased with us tonight. Help us to be an encouragement. And this morning I pray that as we open up your word now, that you would speak through weakness, that you would glorify Jesus Christ and you would cause our hearts not only to be curious about spiritual things, God, that you would cause our hearts to be courageous when we know what it is that we're supposed to do and we pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The book of Daniel is remarkable and one of its central truths is that God is sovereign over all things including world powers, empires, and nations. In fact, if we're not going to do this right now, but if you do go back to chapter two, he says there that God Almighty in his sovereignty literally raises up kings and removes kings. He has the authority over all authorities. He is the king of all kings. And as such, what we find in history and what we find even in the book of Daniel is world powers, nations and empires rising and falling. You look within scripture itself in Bible times and you find different empires taking turns sort of the top of the world. There is the Hittites and then the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans and more modern times there's been nations such as France and Spain and Britain and Germany and China and America who have enjoyed for a season sitting on what perceived was the top of the world.

What's interesting though is that there's always transitions and every transition of that empire nation or world power, it proves something that we saw in Daniel 4:17 where it says that, "The most high," that's God almighty, "rules the kingdoms of man and gives it to whom he will." And to be more specific of what that means in its entirety, the significance of nations and peoples, we can think about God's redemptive plans in human civilization. When God speaks to us in Isaiah and he gives this metaphor of pouring out the bucket of his redemptive plans over history. And so if you can imagine, okay, all of humanity, all human civilization, every culture, every person, every family and everything connected to a human being being put into one bucket, God's bucket, and he's pouring that bucket out over history or if you can use another illustration that he uses and that is that he puts everything connected to humanity on a scale to weigh it.

He says, this is what I consider about nations. He says, "Nations are like a drop from a bucket and are counted as dust on the scales." Now every person in this room, if you were born in America, you have enjoyed the privilege of living in a nation your entire life, assuming that you are at the top of the world. We have enjoyed freedom and security, we have a very strong military and in some ways a lot of places in the world look at America and they lean their ladder against the stability of America. And so when you read stuff like this, we can't imagine that this is true of us, but what he's saying is this, let's personalize this. America in God's redemptive plans put into the bucket is a drop and it's just a dust particle on his scale.

Now, if you can absorb that, then you can understand what I'm about to say and that is, if all this is true, then this world and this nation is a foolish place to make your final investment. It's a good place to make an investment. What we find in Daniel is a man who just like Jesus said, "This is how I want you to pray. Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And so seeking to take the value system of heaven, seeking to bring the truth of God to this place, seeking to do good to our culture, to protect freedoms, to protect people is all absolutely a good investment.

But if it is your final investment, it is a foolish investment. At the end of Daniel 6... I'm sorry, Daniel 5, there's a transition. There's one sentence, just one sentence given. It's Isaiah, there was the Babylonian empire and suddenly their king was killed. Darius the Mede. Medes and the Persians, they rose to the top of the world. You and I cannot even imagine the ripples of fear if this happened today to our country. Just imagine the impact on the world markets.

We can't imagine it because we won't imagine it, but one day, one day it will happen. America is not heaven. It's not the heaven and Daniel 6, what it teaches us is not only an example of how to live and thrive in a culture that is increasingly hostile to our faith, but also how to live and thrive in a culture that is destined to end. Verse 1, "It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; and over them three high officials of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give an account so that he might suffer no loss. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him and the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault because he was faithful and no error or fault was found in him.

Then these men said, 'we shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.' Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, 'oh, king Darius live forever. All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and force it by injunction that whoever makes petition to any God or man for 30 days except to you, o king shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, king established the injunction and signed the document so that it cannot be changed according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.' Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he had done previously. Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. Then they came near and said before the king concerning the injunction, 'oh king, did you not sign an injunction that anyone who makes a petition that any other God or man with within 30 days except to you o king shall be cast into the den of lions?'

The king answered and said, 'The thing stands fast according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.' And then they answered and said before the king, 'well, Daniel who is one of the exiles from Judah pays no attention to you o king or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.' Then the king when he had heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel and he labored till the sun went down to rescue him.

Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, 'know, o king, that it is the law of the

Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.' Then the king commanded and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions and the king declared to Daniel, 'May your God whom you serve, continually deliver you.'

And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palaces and spent the night fasting. No diversions were brought to him and sleep fled from him. Then at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish and the king declared to Daniel, "Oh, Daniel, servant of the living God is your God whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions,' and Daniel said to the king, 'o king, live forever. My God sent his angel and shut the lion's mouths. They have not harmed me because I was found blameless before him and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.'

Then the king was exceedingly glad and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den and no kind of harm was found on him because he had trusted in his God and the king commanded and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions. They, their children and their wives and before they reached the bottom of the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces. Then King Darius wrote to all the people's nations and languages that dwell in all the earth, peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble in fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God enduring forever. His kingdom shall never be destroyed in his dominion there should be no end. He delivers and rescues. He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth. He who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

This is the word of God for us, recorded and preserved all the way down through the centuries that we would have an account of this story to teach us not only how to live but some truths about God himself. And the first one if you want to take notes is this, is that God calls us to live with distinction among the people.

If you remember where we've been and what's happening in this story is 70 years, nearly 70 years have passed from when we started in Daniel, and if you remember what happened, there was a king of Babylon and he came into Jerusalem. He invaded it three times in 20 years and every time he invaded it, he exiled some of its people. First the royal families and their youth, which included Daniel. And then the second, about nine years later, the professional class, there was 10,000 people in that second exile who were literally ripped away from their homes and culture and institutions that all applauded their worldview that flowed from scripture and they brought them to Babylon with the intentions of not only assimilating them into their culture but also reprogramming their worldview.

There was 10,000 of them in that second wave. The third wave was enormous, but in the second wave there was a lot of them who were under the influence of a false teacher. His name was Hananiah. And Hananiah had a lot of influence and he encouraged the people not to go into the city of Babylon but to settle just outside

of the city to form their own little enclave, to have their own schools, to have their own little stores. They have their own businesses, they have their own little place separated and you can read his influence in these exiles life in Jeremiah 28. There you'll find that he says things such as don't assimilate in the city because if you do, what's going to happen is you're going to lose your own cultural identity. Instead, we stay outside the city, we curse the city, we pray against the city. If we go in the city, we litter in the city and then we get out of the city.

God has told me in two years he's going to destroy Babylon and we are going to be able to go back to Jerusalem where we're going to regain all of our cultural power and influence. Well, God Almighty says, "That's not what I said." And so he calls one of his prophets named Jeremiah to write a letter and you can read the letter that was inspired by God himself in Jeremiah 29.

And there in that letter we find things such as we're not to separate from the city, nor are we to conform to the city, live in the city, but don't live like the city. You're going to go in the city and the reason is because I've called you to be a kingdom of priest and a holy nation. I want you to live different and distinct from all the peoples around you, but to live with enough hope that they're going to ask you, "Why do you have hope while you live so differently in this world?" And then you can be a kingdom of priest and point people to me.

There in the city I want you to build houses and live in them. I want you to plant gardens and eat at their produce. I want you to marry and have children. I want you to know your numbers and keep track of your numbers because you are a covenant people and I want you to seek the welfare of the city where you're going and this is what Daniel did for 70 years. Now, this is really important. When the empire of Babylon that he had invested 70 years of his life, I just want you to imagine you have a job where you're investing 70 years of energy, creativity, ideas, getting up from the mat after a failure, big successes, 70 years of investment in order to do just what Jeremiah said, he has been a senior advisor to the king and so things such as parks and neighborhoods and laws and institutions, he's been seeking to be an influence in the city for its good and after 70 years time, he sees his entire investment in ruin.

But what's amazing about Daniel? When the empire that he invested in fell, although it was ruined, he was not ruined and the reason is because Babylon was never his final investment. You see, when Persia took over the Medes and the Persians, he just kept doing his job unto the Lord. Verse two, he says, "So that the king might not suffer loss." It's like all I got a new king, he's got some new laws and now I'm going to seek the welfare of the city.

We're told in verse three it says that he became distinguished because an excellent spirit was in him. If you remember when we were in chapter four, it was the king of Babylon who looked at Daniel and he says, "You know what, Daniel? Here's the deal." He says, it's three times to him. He says, "I call all these people in for advice and they have no discernment. They have no wisdom and I keep calling you. And the reason you have all that is because you have the spirit of the holy gods in you. There's something different about you. There's something within you that gives you just a different ticker. You just like have a completely different world-

view, wisdom and discernment.”

The spirit of God living in him began to change his own spirit. This is actually a very hard thing to translate, excellent spirit. It can be he has an excellent spirit, the Holy Spirit. It can also mean the Holy Spirit is so captivated his spirit that he now has a spirit of excellence, what he puts his hands to, he tries really hard that it would be good for the city and not only is there a spirit of excellence, the spirit of excellence, it creates this desire for blamelessness, which is why when his enemies and peers became professionally jealous of his promotion, they looked for dirt, found only integrity.

They said that there was no fault or no error or fault was found in him. You boil these two words down to their source and what it looks like is this. There was no sense of commission or omission. In other words, they looked at him and they said, “The spirit of excellence within you that there’s things that we all know that we shouldn’t be doing and you don’t do them, and then we all know that there’s certain things that you should be doing and it’s crazy. He just keeps doing all those things too.”

Spirit of excellence. You see, Daniel was an example of Jesus’ words to us and Matthew five when he says, “You are the salt of the earth.” You’re the salt of the earth because most of us have refrigerators we don’t actually use salt how the ancient world used salt, we use it for flavor. The ancient world used salt for a preservative. A salt was used as a preservative. It would be wrapped around things such as meat. In order to protect against decay, you found things that would be in disorder or decay without salt. You’d wrap it with salt and it would preserve it. Here’s the thing about salt. Salt has no effect as a preservative when it stays with other salt.

You know the salt right now and your shaker at home, you know it’s doing nothing. It’s giving nothing flavor, it’s preserving nothing and it’s because it’s around salt. In other words, Jesus command to us, and Daniel’s example for us, is go to places that face decay. Salt is attracted to places of decay, of disorder, and by my spirit it gives and bares fruit in your life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, truth, wisdom of hope. Be a preservative in the city, be a preservative around people, be different, but be a preservative.

So let me encourage us as a church family to gather to grow and then scatter to bless. Gather to grow and scattered to bless. Let me ask you a question. I’ve asked myself this this week. If I moved away, would Raleigh miss me? I’m not asking for an answer, but you’re very, very kind. That was exceptional. Yeah. I don’t know if anybody here has enough influence that the entire city would know. Is there a neighborhood that would miss you if you moved away? A neighbor? A park? A business? An HOA? A school board? A classroom? Is there anything in the city that would miss us if we left?

We are called to be a holy people that distinguishes ourselves by our life that we might be able to be a kingdom of priest pointing people to God and for that to happen, we have to grow, which is why we gather. We come here and we gather, we’re in his word, we’re singing, we’re being encouraged, we’re being reminded of his

promises so that we can be strong, which is you should ask, am I engaged? Am I activated? Am I using my spiritual gifts to serve with other people? Am I meeting anybody and is there any possibility that would be an encouragement to other people while I'm here? But then with the strength that we receive when we gather that we then scatter and we scatter to bless, to bless the lost in our city, the poor in our city, refugees in our city, neighborhoods in our city, parks, schools, businesses. Here's the question, are you a preservative for anything facing decay or disorder in our community?

And if not, this is the first day of the rest of your life. Find one park and pick up trash. Find one neighbor to get to know. Find one school, one teacher that needs school supplies, be a preservative. Second truth is that God's desire for our distinction makes harm unavoidable. I wish this wasn't the case. I wish this being so distinct the world would just embrace us as its own, but it won't. Daniel's distinction you notice led to not only promotion but also professional jealousy. When his peers looked for dirt and found only integrity, they said, "The only way we're going to get this guy if we attack his devotion to his God." It's really important you see this, is that Daniel was absolutely subject to the human laws up until those human laws forced him to violate the law before God, in which case he practiced respectful personal civil disobedience in order to honor God.

Just in case, let me just do a little side thing here, okay? Just in case anybody is really bored Thursday morning you say, "You know what? I really want to do a deep dive on who is this Darius guy." You're probably going to get confused, so let me just tell you. Okay? Darius is a man in archeology who's the name Darius is actually assigned and tied to five different Persian emperors. We don't really know who this guy is precisely, there's different ideas that are surrounding him. We do know that Cyrus came to the throne as the ultimate emperor over all of the Persian empire, and he's the one after 70 years allowed the Jewish people to go back to Jerusalem. This Darius is in between Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar. All of a sudden we have Darius and then Cyrus. Some people believe that Darius is simply a title for Cyrus.

Others believe that because the Persian empire was so enormous that this first Darius was actually a subservient king to him, that he was given basically control over the city of Babylon and some of its regions because... But he was still subservient to Cyrus. The fact is, I don't know necessarily who this guy was, but what we're told was he said, "I need to organize whatever I'm responsible in 120 blocks, put somebody over them and put somebody over them and eventually like Daniel needs to be over all of them."

This caused a lot of strain, but it's really interesting is that when this edict passed, notice what Daniel did. These words are so important in verse 10. "He went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber toward Jerusalem." Now, Daniel would've remembered and did remember for 70 long years what Solomon prayed in First Kings 8, when the temple was just completed, he prayed to God and he said, "God, if your people are ever exiled, if they're ever pulled away from you, if they're ever in trouble and they turn their face towards this temple in Jerusalem, would you hear their prayer?"

70 years, three times a day, Daniel, "He went up to his upper chamber where the window faced Jerusalem

and he got down on his knees just as he did the day when the document was signed and he prayed and gave thanks before his God.” And these are very important words, “As he had done previously.” That shows that he didn’t do it to spite the edict. He did it because he loved doing it.

He loved doing it so much so that essentially his actions said, “You can take my life because you’re can before you take my praying.” And his praying was so part of his daily life that his enemies not only knew when to look, but where to look. That Daniel, it’s really a beautiful thing. He just lived up to his name so well, the word Daniel, three syllables. Dan-ie-l, judge, my, God. Now he’s not God’s judge. You flip it around it’s God is my judge. He lived his entire life as believing this, that it is God alone who he is going to give an account that God sees everything that I do, that he’s right in all that he does, and that he’s right in every verdict that he delivers.

Daniel said, “I belong to God and therefore my problems belong to God and therefore the only thing I need to worry about is obeying God.”

And therefore, on this point that God desires that our distinction be so real that he wants us to know ahead of time that it’s going to bring some hostility. That harm is unavoidable. There’s two applications I want to give here. The first is this, just like Daniel, let’s respond with more passion to scripture than edict. Daniel did not pray to spite the edict. He prayed because he loved God and he loved talking to God and talking to God became his pattern. Let me just say just a few things. I care about our country. I really do. I pray for our country and its leaders. I believe that we have a stewardship of freedom, that we’re going to be held accountable before God, how we exercise that stewardship. And I believe that we have amazing freedoms including the freedom to worship that’s worth energy in protecting.

I vote and I hope you do. I write and call leaders who are about to vote on things. I encourage you too, if the Lord puts that upon your heart. I have a son who’s in the military. I care about our country and I care about the freedoms of our country. But Providence, hear this clearly, our deepest energies as the people of God should bear witness that Christ and not our country is our first love. And if you’re confused as to what I’m talking about, let me give you an example, an example of what it looks like to be more passionate about an edict than scripture.

During COVID, the first few months of COVID, for eight weeks or so we had no live services here, but they were live. It was just live-streamed. We weren’t in the room. And during that time, I received a lot of phone calls and a lot of emails from people who had just remembered that God said, “It’s really important for you not to forsake the assembly of the saints.” And one of the things that I’ll never forget about that time is how many of those emails and calls were from people who were genuinely missing being together because they were here all the time, and yet they were sympathetic to the realities of the decisions that were before us. But another thing that I remember is how many people wrote remembering that there is a scripture about gathering who rarely gathered for worship before COVID and have rarely gathered since. God forbid the world see more passion in us to maintain the control of our worship, then our desire and delight to worship.

We don't pray to spite an edict, we pray and we worship and we sing and we love because God's word says to do so. And the second thing I know that probably caused me a couple emails this week, so let me move on.

Let's anticipate some hostility. Jesus knew harm would come to the faithful, which is why Jesus said, "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own, but I chose you out of the world. Therefore the world hates you." Y'all remember the movie... It's the Lord of the Rings, right? There's probably some of you who read the books. If you had the courage to read all the way through. They're long and the movies are forever long. But there's a really amazing point at the end. If you're like, "I've never heard anything about this." So there's the stories. It's called the Lord of the Rings. Okay?

There's these little hobbits and two of them are called, there's this... How are you going to explain this really quickly? They're called to save the world. And so they leave this place called the Shire. They lived in the Shire their whole life. And they're like the people, they're like the other hobbits. They have the same fears, they have the same dreams, the same loves the same behaviors as everybody else there in the Hobbit. There's uniformity there. And then suddenly they go out and this amazing adventure takes them to places where they see things they've never seen. And in the context of doing so is of course the story is a metaphor of salvation, is that they're born again.

They see the salvation of the world, they see greater powers and they're changed. Their whole DNA, their operating system is completely changed. And then all of a sudden at the end, after the world is saved, they come back to the Shire and nobody can understand each other. They come back and after seeing all that they've seen, they're like, "Why are all the other hobbits so uptight about these small things?" And the people in the Shire, they look at these people who have come back and they're sort of heroic. They know that they're different. They've had this life-changing experience, but nobody can understand them. And so they live the rest of their time in wondering why in the world are these people fearless? And the other is wondering, why are these people so fearful?

When we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we have been living in the Shire our whole life with everybody else. We share the same loves, we share the same fears, everything, and suddenly we see Christ and he changes our heart. He causes us to be born again to a new and living hope. And what does he do? He chooses us out of the world. We leave the Shire for a time and suddenly we're utterly transformed. But then we come back into the Shire and we live differently. And yet people look at us and they find us strange and we find it so strange that they don't see what we have already seen.

And as a result of that, we should be understanding of people's misunderstanding of who we are and what we care about. Just think about this. We've seen Christ and in seeing Christ, we've seen Christ's word. And as a result of that, there are some things that we used to practice with the people in the Shire that we now look at as that's sin. I don't want to do that anymore. That caused me shame and guilt. And so we don't do it anymore. But for the people who still live in the Shire who've never been out, who's never seen Christ, who's

never been born again, who don't care about the Bible, they look at our life and say, "Why don't you participate anymore?"

And then we who've heard the promises of God that say that, "We do not have to fear the things that the world naturally fears like dying." Well, the rest of the world looks and says, "How can you be so confident in a funeral?" And add to all of this, the closest thing that the world has to God is religion. And religion has nothing to do with God. What religion says is, "If you work hard enough, God might accept you." We have the gospel. We've heard the gospel that says this, "That God has already accepted and forgiven us because we have placed our faith in Jesus' good work." Now, what does this do? What it does is this, is when the world looks at our life and they're still striving to achieve, they're still striving to get there. And they look at us and we talk about the confidence of already being accepted, already being forgiven and already being fearless about death.

We look so reckless and arrogant to the rest of the world. And so be understanding of people's confusion that we've been called out of the world. A little bit of harm is unavoidable. And third, God sent Christ to enter the lion's den for us. At the break of dawn, you notice that Darius ran to the den to see if Daniel was still alive. He calls in, "Daniel is still alive," in verse 22. He responds, "My God has sent his angel to shut the lion's mouths. They have not harmed me because I was found blameless before him." Well, completely unaware of what God said in Ezekiel 18 that children should not be punished and killed for the sins of their parents, Darius killed not only the conspirators, but also their families. Horrible thing, it's a terrible thing. It's also a very common thing for these pagan kings of old is that they had an enemy they would kill the enemy and to protect themselves from the kids growing up and seeking to avenge the parents' death, they would just go ahead and kill the kids.

This was not prescriptive in God's plan. It was descriptive what was happening in the world, but one thing that it did prove, you see, there's some people that say, "I think why Daniel, this whole thing. I just don't think that those lions were very hungry." Well, clearly they were hungry. These were lions that were professionally starved to become executioners, which is why all these people were thrown in. They died before they hit the dirt. And yet Daniel was rescued.

And though inspiring as it is, this story I want you to know, this illusion. Many people, maybe some of you, you were taught early in your life, little Johnny, little Susie, if you're good and you grew up and be good and trust God, no scratches will come upon you. And then they grew up and you grew up and clearly scratches have come upon you. Then you look through history and you found that there's been all kinds of martyrs who faithfully were eaten by lions to hold fast to their faith in Christ. And then you look even deeper into the Bible and you find that there was somebody who was even more righteous than Daniel and more trusting of God than Daniel, who was also torn apart, put into a den and sealed with a stone.

You see Daniel's in heaven today saying, "Do not see me as the hero of the story. You've got to look at Jesus."

For Jesus lived without sin. And yet worst charges of blasphemy were brought against him. Jesus was hung on a cross. Psalm 22 tells us hundreds of years in advance what the Christ would say when he was on the cross. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? They open wide their mouths at me like a ravening and roaring lion." Unlike Daniel, the lions toward Jesus to pieces. Unlike Daniel, no angel stood next to him to protect him. Unlike Daniel, Jesus died to pay for our sin. And unlike Daniel who walked out of that den, but later in his life died, Jesus Christ rose from the dead to live forevermore, inviting all of us to put our faith and trust in him and be forgiven of our sin.

And friends, the miracle of the den of lions is not just the suspension of the natural order. It also points to the forever permanent restoration of the natural order for all of us who are in Christ. Isaiah 1 says of heaven, "The leopard shall lie down with a young goat and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and the little child shall lead them." In heaven little kids play with lions. What happened in Daniel 6 was not just a suspension, no miracle in the Bible is simply a suspension of the natural order. It's a pointer that this is what heaven is going to be like for everyone.

We too will live in perfect peace. And so Providence, let me urge you to trust Jesus as the ultimate hero today. Have you ever put your faith in Christ? Have you ever looked at your sin problem and said, "I will never be able to remove this guilt from my own life. I need help." That's what a doctor does. Jesus says, "I'm the great physician for people who are sick in their soul." He's the only one. And we trust him by telling him, "I cannot save myself. But I put my trust in your son, Jesus Christ, in his death and resurrection, and I confess him as Lord." I urge you to do that right now, to call upon him right now. And for those of us who have, he tells us to remember and proclaim that we believe what he did by taking the Lord's supper.

So if you took a cup when you came in, it has two things, a little bread and a little juice, and each one of those are symbols of Jesus' body and his blood. And the Bible tells me, if you've never trusted Christ, to tell you not to take it, for to take it is to tell all the rest of us that you treasure and you have faith in Christ. And so you can take this time to consider the things that you've heard, but if you have trusted Christ, he tells us never to take it unless we first confessed our sin. So let me give you a moment right now where you're at to pray and confess your sins to him.

Father, you've been so good to us for your grace and your mercy, your kindness and sending Jesus to us. Jesus, you have been so strong for us living without sin and yet dying for ours. Rising from the dead. We treasure you. We love you, and we proclaim our hope, our steadfast hope in you. And we pray this in Christ's name, amen.

On the night Jesus was betrayed he took bread, he broke it, he gave thanks, and he began talking about how his body was going to be broken. That all who put their faith in him, that they would be restored into a relationship with God Almighty, his life for our life. So if you have a relationship with God, and you know it's entirely because of Jesus' willingness to give his life and take and eat in remembrance of him.

And then Jesus took a cup and in that cup there was some wine, looked just like blood. He began talking about the fact that his body was going to be broken so badly that it would bleed, but that blood would not be wasted in the dirt. It would begin a new covenant, not just to cover our sins, but to take them away forever. So if you know the peace that comes from being forgiven, joy of a clear conscience, and it's because of Jesus alone, the take and drink and remembrance of him.

Father, we love you and we want to respond to you now by singing of your promises to us. So would you give us energy to sing? Would you focus our heart and attention upon you? Would you cause us, Father, to rejoice in your steadfast love? And we pray all of this, the perfect and the strong, the only name of Jesus Christ our savior. Amen.

Would you stand and let's sing together.

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