**IN GOD’S WILD KINGDOM**

**(Daniel 6:1-28)**

 The show began in 1963 and continued until 1988. I remember that it aired on Sunday evenings, and I enjoyed watching it. It’s first announcer was the director of the St. Louis Zoo, and his co-host appeared on the Johnny Carson show 100 times. The first man was Marlin Perkins, and the second was Jim Fowler. Their show was *Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom.*

 It’s second incarnation began in 2002 and still runs on the cable channel Animal Planet.

 I’ve not seen any of those episodes, but I remember the ones from my childhood. I remember lions chasing a zebra with the lions winning and bringing the zebra down so the entire pride could enjoy a thanksgiving feast of sorts.

 Watching a pride lunch down on a zebra makes an impression on a 7-year old kid. There is a reason the male lion is called the King of Beasts. There is a reason Satan is depicted as a roaring lion that is on the prowl seeking someone to devour. And there is a reason Jesus is said to be the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

 The best-known chapter in the Bible that features lions is found in Daniel 6, and the best known story about Daniel is found in the same chapter. Every child who frequents Sunday School has heard the story of Daniel in the lion’s den, but it is not just a story for kids.

 We first met Daniel in chapter 1 when he and other Jewish youths were taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar. Some say that Daniel would have been no older than 14 at that time, and that would have been in 605 BC. History tells us that the King of Babylon was overthrown by the Empire of the Medes and Persians in 539 BC. That would have put Daniel at age 80 when the Kingdom changed hands.

 Daniel was a competent administrator and quickly gained the trust of Darius the Mede. There is great debate as to who he was. Some say it was Cyrus by another name. Some say it was a General who was temporarily made King until Cyrus could take over. We don’t really know. Based on Daniel 6:28, it seems to me that Darius and Cyrus were two different people. To make matters more confusing, Darius the Mede is not the same person as Darius I who was the fourth King of the Persian Empire.

 From King Nebuchadnezzar and from the story of King Belshazzar we learned that God is the King of His own Kingdom, and of His Kingdom there will be no end. In this chapter, King Darius, whoever he was, will say something similar. God’s Kingdom is far wilder than anything I ever saw on Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom. We are going to look at two things we will see and one thing we must do in God’s Wild Kingdom.

1. **IN GOD’S WILD KINGDOM WE WILL FIND LIONS IN OUR DEN.**

 Before Daniel was ever thrown into a den of actual lions, he encountered lions of a different sort. Look at 6:1-5. Despite being an octogenarian, Daniel had shown himself to be faithful, talented, and valuable. Darius was given the job of organizing the new government of this vast empire. A satrap was the equivalent to the governor of a province, and Darius divided the empire into 120 provinces. He put three officials over the satraps. Daniel wasn’t just one of three; he was the chief of the three. Darius had great faith in Daniel. There was, no doubt a considerable amount of corruption and graft that was going on in the far-flung empire. It was clear that Daniel was as honest as the day was long.

 Daniel’s high position did not sit well with the other officials. First, Daniel was a Jew, not one of them. And second, honest Daniel would prove an impediment to them enriching themselves with their schemes. They had to find some way to get rid of him.

 Daniel’s enemies began a clandestine investigation into his life and service. They were looking for dirt they could use against him.

 Mark Twain once said that you don’t need to spend any time and money looking into your family. He advised, “Go into politics, and your opponents will do it for you.”

 The more things change, the more they stay the same.

 Daniel’s opponents had a problem. They couldn’t find anything. Daniel’s character was sterling. His service had been impeccable.

 I have news for you, not everyone is going to like you. If you seek to faithfully serve the Lord, you will be targeted by someone. You may be surprised by who it is. Betrayal is not anything new. Jesus experienced it, and so will you.

 When others come after you, just make sure that it is not because of anything wrong you have done. Peter wrote, “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed” (1 Peter 3:14).

 In the next chapter he cautions, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil doer, or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name” (4:15-16).

 Daniel’s opponents decide the only way they were going to take him down was to use his faith against him. Look at what they did in vv. 6-9. They duped the King into signing into law a requirement that for 30 days, the only one someone could pray to was the King. Thus, it would be unlawful for anyone to pray to his god regardless of who that god was.

 These devious men knew that Daniel was a man of prayer. He prayed regularly to his God, and they were confident that He would continue doing so even though a law had been passed that temporarily outlawed it.

 They were right. Look at what happened in vv. 10-15. Their evil plan worked. Even though the King liked Daniel and supported Daniel, the law was the law, and there was nothing he could do to change it.

 What would you have done if you had been in Daniel’s position? I think most of us could have rationalized a way to obey the law. We might have said, “A follower of God is supposed to obey the laws of the land. It’s just 30 days. I can pray silently on my bed with the lights out at night. No one will know.”

 We read in James 4:17, “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” Our job is not to protect ourselves. Our job is to obey God regardless of the consequences. That is what Daniel did, and that is what we are to do when we find lions in our den.

 Those lions may come in the form of teachers, elected officials, neighbors, family members, and anybody who opposes us because of our faith.

1. **IN GOD’S WILD KINGDOM WE WILL FACE LIONS IN THEIR DEN.**

 Daniel did the right thing by doing what he always did. Three times a day he retired to his living quarters. He opened the window that looked eastward to Jerusalem. He knelt down and prayed to God. He didn’t open the window to be seen, but because the widow was open he could be seen. He wasn’t going to change his routine now just to protect himself.

 Notice that Daniel had a designated place to pray and a designated time to pray. If we are going to be successful in developing a strong prayer life, we need to set a place and set a time. Sure, you can pray anywhere, and you can pray anywhere, but you are more likely to remain consistent if you know where you are going to pray and when.

 So, Daniel had a place and a time, and the third thing he had was the commitment to pray. That is probably what we most lack—the resolve to pray.

 I don’t normally make New Year’s Resolutions because when I do, they don’t last very long. If I were to make one, it would be developing a stronger prayer life. Both this church and I need to be stronger in prayer. That is where the battle is. One may said that prayer doesn’t prepare us for the battle. Prayer is the battle.

 It is interesting that right after calling us to put on the spiritual armor and listing what each piece is, Paul called upon the believers in Ephesus to pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer, to keep alert with all perseverance, and to pray for all the saints. We need to put on the armor so we can pray because that is where the battle is.

 Look at 6:16-18. The King did the one thing he did not want to do, the one thing he had tried to find a way around but couldn’t—he ordered Daniel be put in the den of lions. In my study, I learned that the lion’s den was often a dry cistern. Cisterns were deep place dug to collect rain and rain runoff. This cistern was so deep and the walls were such that a strong lion was not able to escape it. Lions were placed in this cistern and enough food was withheld that these lions were ravenously hungry. When a man was placed in the den with those lions, it was unlikely that he would last long.

 This cistern had a covering and once Daniel was thrown in, a stone was placed over the covering. These executions were always carried out at sundown the day the accused was convicted. They didn’t have a lengthy appeal process. There was no death row.

 The Persians believed that if you were eaten by the lions that signified you were guilty. If by some miracle you survived, that signified you were innocent. The King committed Daniel to the lion’s den with a prayer (v. 16).

 Do you see some parallels between the passion of Jesus and that of Daniel?

* Both were accused by men who were opponents, and their opposition was born of envy.
* Both were convicted even though the governing authority wanted to spare them.
* Both were encased in a stone enclosure, and
* That enclosure was sealed so that no one would tamper with it.

 I find it interesting that in Daniel’s case, the only one who didn’t get any rest was the King not Daniel. Daniel slept well because God sent an angel to close the mouths of the lions.

 The Bible teaches that when Jesus returns the lion will sleep with the lamb. Just possibly, Daniel slept with the lions that night. It would have been dark in that enclosed den. Maybe the angel guided Daniel in between a couple of lions to keep him snug and warm.

 What are the lion’s dens that we face?

* Hospitalization?
* Serious injury?
* Financial hardship or even bankruptcy?
* Death of loved one?
* Depression?
* Persecution?

 Christians are not immune from going through dark and perilous times.

 I want you to look at Hebrews 11. We call this chapter “The Hall of Faith.” It tells us of Old Testament saints whose lives were living illustrations of faith. Daniel is not mentioned by name in this chapter, but there is a reference to his experience. Let’s look at 11:32-35a. It would have been great had the writer stopped there. Each of those references called to mind a victorious episode, but the author didn’t stop there, so we have to continue. Look at vv. 35b-40.

 James Montgomery Boice wrote, “God calls some to win by living. Others are called to win by dying.” You see, either way, live or die, with faith we win.

1. **IN GOD’S WILD KINGDOM, TRUST THE LION KING IN YOUR LIFE.**

 Look at 6:19-28.

 In preparation for this message, I read a sermon peached by David Dykes. He is the pastor of Green Acres Baptist church in Tyler, Texas. Brother Dykes did some research on lions before he preached on this passage. I want to share some of the things he discovered and a little of what he said.

 Lions are very group-oriented. They live and hunt in prides. In each pride there is always a dominant male. What he does, the others do. When he sleeps, the rest sleep. When he hunts, the others hunt. When he eats, they all eat. This dominant male, often called the Alpha Male, is in charge until a new male comes along and challenges and drives him off.

 I believe on that evening when Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den, there was new boss of the Pride: The Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

 Can’t you just imagine the scene? Here’s the new Dominant Lion. He said, “. . . settle down fellas. You don’t want to eat old Daniel. After all, he is one half grit and one-half backbone! Besides, you are going to have an all-you-can-eat breakfast buffet tomorrow morning. It’s a little chilly down here, so one of you lay down there so Daniel will have something warm to lie beside. Another one of you, let him share your mane so he’ll have a soft pillow. And there are a lot of flies down here. Why don’t a couple of you swish your tails over his face to keep those flies away?” So, Daniel just lay down, pulled his pocket Old Testament out of his robe and had a good time–he was reading between the lions! (Sorry!)

 Let me ask you: who had more peace that night, Daniel in the pit of lions or Darius in the palace? Darius had his own lions to fight: the lion of conscience, the lion of guilt, and the lion of accusation. He didn’t sleep a wink. What’s the difference? Daniel was in touch with the real King, not the king of beasts, but the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who is also called the Prince of Peace. So here was old Daniel, resting comfortably, peace in the midst of pressure, while Darius stays up all night fighting his own personal lions.

 Which scene best describes your life right now? Yeah, there are going to be lions. Sure, you will be thrown into the pit, but when it happens, make sure you are in touch with the Dominant Lion, the One who can give you peace in midst of pressure.

 While Daniel was spared, those who orchestrated his arrest and who had duped the king took Daniel’s place. Not only did they not make it through the night, they didn’t even make it to the floor of the den before they were devoured.

 While OT Law did not allow a child to be punished for the sins of his parents, the Empire of Persia was not governed by Jewish Law. Sadly, the enemies of Daniel were punished along with their families. That is what the Persians did. They were never accused of being soft on crime.

 Just as King Nebuchadnezzar had done when Daniel was a younger man, King Darius wrote a message to the people of his Kingdom. Look at what he wrote in 6:25-27.

 It would be wonderful if after observing your life, someone said to a friend, “You know, we really ought to serve Otto’s God. We really ought to serve Kathy’s God. We really ought to serve Nancy’s God. It is clear the He has acted on their behalf, and that He is the real deal.”

 Is your life an inducement to someone else to serve the God you serve? Or could someone else observe you and not feel a strong pull to your Savior? When thinking about your God, would they just shrug their shoulders and say, “Nah, I’m good.”

 For others to attracted to our God, they must see that we serve a big God, a God who is able, not a small, tribal deity, but rather a God who works wonders in heaven and on earth.

 C.S. Lewis wrote a series of books called *The Chronicles of Narnia.* In his books there is a lion named Aslan who serves as a Christ-figure.

 In the second book, Prince Caspian, Lucy enters Narnia again. She hasn’t seen Aslan in a long, long time. When they met up again, they have a wonderful reunion. Lucy says to Aslan, who, again, represents Christ, “Aslan, you’re bigger now.”

 Aslan replies, “Lucy, that’s because you are older. You see, Lucy, every year that you grow, you will find me bigger.”

 That should be our experience. As we grow, we will discover that our Lion King is bigger, much bigger. It is my hope and my prayer that those around us will notice, too.