

AN ANSWER FOR THE ANXIOUS, DAN 6

Unshakable Faith #6

◆**Intro:** In 2006, the St. Petersburg Times reported the death of a Ukrainian man who was mauled by a lioness at the Kiev Zoo. He encountered the animal on purpose, believing that God would protect him. A zoo official said the man lowered himself by a rope into a concrete enclosure holding four lions. Shouting, "God will save me, if he exists," the man took off his shoes and strode toward the animals. One lioness came to meet him. She knocked him down and quickly severed his carotid artery. Doesn't that just strike you as foolish? I don't think Daniel entered the lions pit like that, but neither do I think he entered it in panicked hysteria. We need to be a bit more thoughtful about what God is showing us through Daniel's experience with the lions.

◆We have seen all along in the book that God keeps proving that he is sovereign over all peoples and lands and nations. That he can stop fire from burning, or grant interpretations to dreams. In fact it almost seems in this episode of Daniel's saga like "here we go again". This is the third ruler Daniel has become high adviser to due to his character and wisdom (recall Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar). This is the second time (we know of) that the other cabinet satraps, senators, governors, etc have tried to have it in for Daniel or his friends by getting the King to sentence them to death. Daniel has been in Babylon now about 70 years and is probably about 90 himself. He has likely encountered this time and time again. Darius is the newest ruler, either an appointee of Cyrus the Great, or another name for him as far as we know.

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What you can't help but notice is that Daniel just keeps plugging away serving in the Babylon swamp under various politicians, being upright, honest and respectable, and at peace at all times. The big question I'd like to consider is how does Daniel remain so steady and peaceful in a turbulent world of changing political power? Presidents come and go, trashing the policies of those before them, altering the direction of a country. Nations conquer and then are conquered. Yet there is Daniel, serving Darius, a new despot in the same old town, just like he did the tyrannical Nebuchadnezzar.

- ◆ The picture of Daniel, I think we have to admit, is one of calm certainty and trust. *After* he finds out it is now against the law to pray to his God (v10), he straight away continues his daily habit of prayer to his God, unfazed. Nothing is mentioned of him rushing to Darius to see if there's a loop hole in the law. No record of standing on Capital Hill denouncing the other side of the aisle for what is clearly a political maneuver. You or I might have rushed home and paced the kitchen in a fury. Or kicked the dog, or done something super macho like on TV where some guys shows his anger by clearing the dishes off the table onto the floor. Daniel does not. Later Daniel is resting among lions and of strong and steady voice when the night is over.
- ◆ Contrast this with Darius the actual king who is caught up in his own law machine, trying desperately to find a way out for Daniel,

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unable to sleep in the night though he owns the greatest luxury known in his day. His empire encompassed more than the previous Babylonian Empire by way of territory conquered. But he's up all night. Which one would you like to be like?

◆1. One reason Daniel is the steady man he is that he expects difficulty and trouble in his pursuit of godliness.

He is not fearful of it because he knows it's his reality. And it is the reality of anyone who wants goodness and righteousness to win out in an evil world. This world is fallen, and sinful, and no matter where you go, or who's in office, evil men will always cause evil while calling it good. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble, but fear not, I have overcome the world.

(Jn16:33)". Paul wrote;

◆2 Timothy 3:12-13. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

◆Part of the reason that you and I live such frustrated, anxious lives is that we are desperately trying to avoid all difficulty and persecution. We walk on eggshells, and can't bring ourselves to speak up because we don't want to make anything harder than it is. We want ease. But God is not concerned with keeping our lives trouble free. Remember, there is no testimony without the test! God is more concerned about our encountering him, and also showing him to the rest of mankind he created! Utopia is not

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our goal. Truth and goodness is our goal and often that does not come easily for goodness is an unnatural grace among sinful people.

◆Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 1Pet 4:12-14

◆Here's how I think Peter would advise us in America today: Expect persecution as a follower of Jesus! When they take your business away because you will not disregard your Christians views of marriage or sexuality, it means you have God on your side, and a supernatural payoff in the end. When Amazon won't sell your book anymore because it upholds a biblical view of life, you should be happy because you are intimately linked with Jesus the Messiah, and his glory is coming in the end, no matter what happens here. Even as I wrote this down on Thursday of this week, Congress was poised to pass the horrendous Equality Act which would give people with gender confusion, and LGBTQ folks privileges at the expense of women, children, and religion. If signed into law, Americans will loose their First Amendment rights of freedom of religion, churches and schools will be forced to redefine marriage and what it means to be male or female along

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the most anti-biology and anti-faith standards ever legislated.

And what then? Will we fall apart? Give up? Panic? No, It's nothing new in human history. Holiness is an uphill battle.

◆ Listen, God is not committed to our comfort! WHOA! HOLD THE PHONE! God's aim is not our smooth and pleasant life. WHAT? He is committed to purifying us as his own people in order that we may demonstrate his goodness in the world. When we live knowing that, we are not trashed by crisis.

◆ *1 Peter 2:9. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

◆ **2. Another reason Daniel is steady is because he knows this world is not his home.**

◆ *1 Pet 2:11-12. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

◆ Daniel is living in exile in another land. But he is highly aware that he belongs to different one. In a way, his whole life in Babylon was a lions den of sorts. He lived his whole life fighting for godliness in a most ungodly culture, chasing after God in a place that consistently tried to make it illegal to do so.

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◆ But Daniel knows Babylon is his assignment, not his home.

Therefore he is free from the frantic pressure of making sure everything works out for pleasure in this world. He is free not to feel slighted that he did not gain as much wealth as the folks living in Beverly Hills during his lifetime. He is free from having to keep hold of a business empire, and battling over tricky little decisions about twisting the laws for profitable advantage - because Daniel lives for something far more than his business.

◆ There is plenty of opportunity for good deeds that glorify God when you are living in a corrupt place.

◆ You can see his spiritual view in his habits, can't you? Three times a day, for 70 years Daniel has been kneeling before God as his real sovereign ruler, and asking for assignment, and direction and mercy. Three times a day, for 70 years Daniel has been facing Jerusalem when he prays even though he can't possibly see it. Why? Because he knows that's where his people belong. He knows he's an alien until he is with God. He knows that God had chosen Israel, and Jerusalem it's capital as a doorway into mankind through which he would make known himself to all men. He knows that there is an empire far more sovereign than Babylon, and it is the king of that empire he really serves. Everything else is small potatoes in comparison.

◆ This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the

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LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile." Jer.29:10-14

◆ That calling on God leads us to an additional reason for Daniel's confidence.

◆ **3. Another reason Daniel is steady in crisis is that he practices the presence of God through prayer.** Peace comes not from possession, income, achievements. It comes from the presence of God alone. God is not gone just because a nation is unholy. Do you want peace? Come near to God's presence. Prayer is the most obvious effectual habit that enables this. And this is clearly a characteristic of Daniel.

◆ It's interesting that Daniel's enemies settle on prayer as the one way to get Daniel in trouble. Clearly they knew they could count on him to do it! It was part of his character that went way back to the beginnings. Remember in chapter 2 when the king had a dream but wanted his magi to both tell him that dream on their own, and interpret it? Remember what Daniel and his friends did? That's right, they spent the night in prayer. Ever spent a night in prayer? I don't think it was a two sentence thing before slipping under the covers. Later in Daniel 9 we'll see most of the

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chapter is his prayer of confession and plea that God in his mercy will keep his exile promise of 70 years and return Israel to their land. In our text for today we read that Daniel

◆ Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.v10-11

◆ So his praying was regular, it was humble, it was a habit, it was to give thanks, and also to ask for help. Not a bad set of traits for payer. Listen, if for you speaking with God is something you do in emergencies mostly, you will not experience so much the calm confidence Daniel had in a lions den. If for you prayer is only like putting money in a vending machine when you want something, you need not expect to have a world view that is utterly confident in a sovereign God. But if you are daily remembering God's rightful place in the scheme of life, and turning to him about life, not just requests, and asking your questions of him, and your directions from him, – then even the lions in your life will be different.

◆ **Conclusion:** Only 12-years-old, and in a moment one Ethiopian girl's world turned into a nightmare. Seven violent men abducted the pre-teen, intending to force her into marriage. The men held the girl for seven days, beating her repeatedly. Such incidents are common in Ethiopia, as several men band together to abduct young girls for the purpose of securing a bride. The girls are

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typically beaten into submission and raped. In this particular instance, there was not a human being within earshot to hear the cries of this girl. But her cries were heard.

◆The unlikely heroes were three majestic Ethiopian lions. Famous for their large black manes, these lions are the national symbol of the country. In response to the girl's cries for help, three large lions leapt from the brush and chased her captors away. Perhaps the child thought she had traded one danger for another, but remarkably, her heroes formed a protective perimeter around her. A half-day later, when the police arrived, the guardian lions simply stood up and walked away. Sgt. Wondimu Wedajo said, "They stood guard until we found her, and then they just left her like a gift and went back into the forest." I don't know how you read that, but here's what I see: our Creator God has the power to turn a predator into a protector. Perhaps an unseen angel was involved here too, as with Daniel. It is not the lions or their dens that present to us our biggest disruptions, but whether or not we are living near unto God when we are thrown into them. And here is the marvel of our Savior Jesus the Messiah. As Isaiah 11 put it, in his day the lion lies down with the lamb, calves and lions will be led by a child, cows and bears will snooze together.