

# THE BREATH OF LIONS

## Daring to be a Daniel | Daniel 6

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Years ago, a circus lion tamer was in the midst of his act, when the lights in the tent suddenly went out. For thirty agonizing seconds, the audience waited in hushed horror for the deadly mauling that, fortunately, never came. Later on, a reporter asked the trainer: "What went through your mind when the lights went out?" *"At first, all I could think of was the sound of those lions breathing. And then I got really scared, because I realized that even though I couldn't see them, even in the dark, they could see me!"*

Can you imagine being in that circle? I want you to imagine it. Because, as we close out this message series today, you'll be leaving the spectator seats shortly to go do your act in the wild world that waits for you. Please remember the breath and eyes that will be upon you -- and the import of this final message I want to share with you.

In September of 539 B.C., the armies of Persia bounded in, literally under cover of darkness, and utterly mauled the once-feared Babylonians. By the time Babylon was taken, the Persians had amassed the largest and most brilliant regime of pre-Roman antiquity. Persia's administrative structure was so ingenious that the Romans later simply copied and implemented it in its entirety. Here's how the system worked. The Persians divided their empire into a mosaic of provinces, each with its own governor. To keep the governor in line, they placed a general and garrison of troops in each province, answerable only to the crown. To make sure the governor and general didn't conspire, there was also a secretary, who reported directly to the home office. And then, just in case all three of those parties went into cahoots, the Persians had officials known as "the King's Eyes" who audited the records of each province! Together, these various functionaries were known as "satraps." Thus, we're told in today's text: **It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. (Dan 6:1-2)**

In his famous Parable of the Talents, Jesus taught that those who prove capable of faithfulness in life's smaller decisions and tests, God elevates to positions of greater influence. As we've seen, that was Daniel's story, again and again. Not only did God lift Daniel up within Babylon, he now raised Daniel to an even higher position in the new Persian government. And there: **Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. (Dan 6:3)**

Now, how do you suppose the other satraps reacted when they found out that King Darius has passed all of them over and is giving a new chief-of-staff role to this squeaky clean Jew? They react like SCAR, the mangy old cat in Disney's film, THE LION KING: **At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were**

**unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. (Dan 6:4) Oh for more Daniels! Finally, these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man... unless it has something to do with the law of his God." (Dan 6:5)**

For time's sake, I'll condense and paraphrase what happens next. The power-brokers come to Darius and say, in effect: *"Bad news, Mr. President. The polls say your influence is waning. We know you're a stickler for freedom of religion, sir, but trust us, political necessity requires emergency measures. Declare that for one month, no prayers be offered to anyone but you, sir. It'll get your name recognition up and in 30 days you can show how humble and generous you are by going back to the laissez-faire policy."* Thus, Darius bought the idea and signed the policy into an edict, saying that whoever broke it would be **thrown into the lions' den. (Dan 6:7b)**

Now, let me pause there to make a practical application of this story. I want to suggest that you and I, like Daniel or that circus performer I mentioned earlier, are never really all that far from the eyes and breath of lions -- THREE SORTS OF LIONS in particular.

There are, FIRST of all, those beasts who breathe down your neck, wanting to see you slip. They may be out-and-out plotters like these Satraps I've just described or they may not be all that mean on the outside. Yet, *if* you are the kind of person who refuses the dishonesty or infidelity that marks some business circles, but instead tries to be true in every way; *if* you are the type of person that doesn't participate in the backbiting gossip or blue humor that characterizes a lot of social circles, but instead is committed to speaking words that build people up; *if* you are the sort of individual who doesn't rationalize sin and seek comrades in it, but instead openly confesses failings and seeks the company of people who will help you grow in godliness; *if* you are one of those people that is progressively letting go of the effort to use your resources to impress other people, and instead trying to use all that you are and have to please God; then you -- just like Daniel -- will be a target for such lions. They'll want to see you slip.

Let me leave flesh and blood aside for a moment and tell you how the Beast who opposes you on the invisible *spiritual* plane thinks. He'd like to put you in a position where you have to choose between devotion to God and devotion to worldly security -- the kind of scenario Daniel faced. You see, there were a number of ways Daniel might have handled the Imperial Edict that no one pray to anyone but the king. He could simply have stopped praying for 30 days. Lots of people take a temporary vacation from worship. He could have prayed silently or secretly. Plenty of people go completely underground with their faith. The Beast and his unwitting lions would have loved to get Daniel interrupting in any way the quality of his connection with God.

You see, the Bible repeatedly suggests that the purity and regularity of his communion with God was the well-spring of the **exceptional qualities** that made for Daniel's stunning effectiveness in all the other areas of his life. If God's opponents can get us to

compromise there, in time they will win compromise and slip-ups in other areas too. Daniel wouldn't let it happen: **Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. (Dan 6:10)**

No surprise, the satraps catch Daniel in the act. They confirm with the King that he'd really signed the edict, knowing -- as verse 8 reminds us -- that **in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, once signed, [a royal edict] cannot be repealed. Then they said to the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day." (Dan 6:13)** Translation: *"You've now got to bring down the hammer on this guy. If you don't, you'll look weak. Very weak."*

And it's right then, when you expect the King to fly into a towering rage, that the Scriptures tell us something really fascinating: **When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him (Dan 6:14).** Darius even prayed: **May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you [Daniel]!" (Dan 6:16)** Presumably, Darius looked for some loophole in the law but there was none. The later verses say that he personally accompanied Daniel to the mouth of the lion's den. Then, having watched Daniel thrown into the pit, as the law required, **the king-- returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment... and he could not sleep (Dan 6:18).**

I said earlier that there are three kinds of lions who watch you in the circle of life. One is like Disney's Scar. But there's a SECOND kind, a type much more like the character of Nala, or like another lioness I read about. Many years ago, Vice-President, George H.W. Bush, represented our country at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. He recounted watching Brezhnev's widow, standing motionless by the coffin of her husband. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid to begin closing it, Brezhnev's wife did something that ranks as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest. As a journalist put it: *"There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, and that that life was best represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that the same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband."*<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Brezhnev was not alone. There are cats out there who are praying that God's Word is right. Alongside the beasts who breathe down your neck, wanting to see you slip, are those creatures who hold their breath, wanting to see you succeed. In every circle you frequent are some people who wonder if this gospel we profess, this approach to abundant life we claim, this Jesus we worship -- might actually be the Way, the Truth, and the Life after all. Like most felines, they are a little skittish. Before fully trusting

God, they are waiting to see... What does God do in someone's heart when she actually puts her trust in Him for her future in the midst of a terminal disease? What happens to a person who cares much more about beginning his day soaking up biblical inspiration than secular information? How does God respond when a person commits to truly tithing? What is the result when men, women, students exchange quality time for quantity time; trends for tradition; materialism for relationships? Is there death or life when someone chooses family bridges over corporate ladders; looking upward over looking inward; commitment over convenience?<sup>2</sup>

There are creatures out there who will come to believe, who will give the glory to God as Darius ultimately did, when they see what God does when even one of His servants dares to make no compromises in worshipping and following Him. Daniel was that person in Persia. Be that person in our time.

If you will, there will be a THIRD and final kind of Lion you'll meet. I'm speaking of the One that Daniel must have encountered in the long darkness of that night in the den, and the One of whom C.S. Lewis spoke in a story with which I'd like to close today. In his book, *THE HORSE & HIS BOY*, Lewis introduces us to an orphaned child named Shasta. On a life-long search for identity and security, Shasta winds up in a dark glen from which he can see no way out. All the fears of his life echo in the cold, clammy fog that swirls about him and the growling of invisible beasts. Suddenly, writes Lewis, "Shasta discovered that someone or somebody was walking beside him. It was pitch dark and he could see nothing. And the Thing (or Person) was going so quietly that he could hardly hear any footfalls. What he could hear, however, was *breathing*. His invisible companion seemed to breathe on a very large scale..."

Unable to see the Presence, Shasta begins to panic, but "once more he felt the warm breath of the Thing on his hand and face." Strangely reassured by the breath, Shasta begins talking. "He [tells] how he had never known his real father or mother and had been brought up sternly by a fisherman." He tells the story of a time when he made a narrow escape from imprisonment, and then was "chased by lions" and forced to swim for his life... He spoke of the time when he was almost at his goal another lion chased him. "Don't you think it was bad luck to meet so many lions?" said Shasta.

A very Large Voice spoke in the darkness. It said: "*There was only one lion.*" "What on earth do you mean?" asked the boy. "I've just told you there were at least two the first night, and ---" "*There was only one,*" said the Voice, "*but he was swift of foot.*" "How do you know?" said the boy. "*Because I was the lion.*" replied the Voice. "*I was the lion who forced you to join with [that friend.] I was the cat that comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave your horse new strength for the last mile so you should reach your destination in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight [because I had woken him], to receive you.*"

Suddenly, the mist in which Shasta had been walking turned from black to gray, and then from gray to white. "Now the whiteness around him became a shining whiteness... He turned and saw, pacing beside him, taller than the horse, a LION... [And] it was from the Lion that the light came. No one ever saw anything more terrible or beautiful... He lifted his face and their eyes *met*. Then instantly the pale brightness of the mist and fiery brightness of the Lion rolled themselves together into a swirling glory and gathered themselves up and disappeared."<sup>3</sup>

Shasta was alone again, but somehow never again alone, never again afraid. Neither was Daniel. Neither will you be, when you face your days ahead. You, too, can live with a LIONHEART in the midst of this wild world. For the One who stopped the mouths of beasts in Daniel's den and opened the mouths of kings with praises in Darius' throne room... the One whom the Book of Revelation calls the Lion of Judah<sup>4</sup>... still says: *"Be my witness wherever you are. Be strong and courageous. For I am with you always, to the close of this age."*

Please pray with me...

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<sup>1</sup>"Wise Christians Clip Obituaries," *Christianity Today*, 10/3/94, p.26.

<sup>2</sup>This litany was inspired by Bob Welch's "A New Course for a New Decade", *Focus on the Family Magazine*, January 1990.

<sup>3</sup>C.S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, chapter 11.

<sup>4</sup>Revelation 5:5.