

Sabbath School Lesson #7 – From the Lions’ Den to the Angel’s Den – 8-14 Feb 2020

Christ sent His angel to shut the lions’ mouths so that Daniel is not hurt. Daniel’s co-workers had sought occasion to find fault in him. “Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him” (Daniel 6:4). The only fault found in him was concerning the law of his God. And so they persuaded king Darius to make a law against worshipping the God of Daniel.

Daniel is best known in the world as a man of prayer. We are familiar with the story of the plot against his life, in the securing of the decree that whoever should “ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days,” save of the king, should be cast into the den of lions, and how “when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime” (Daniel 6:10). There was no compromising, and no shuffling, no attempt at concealment. Why should he hide the fact that he prayed to the God of heaven? It was nothing to be ashamed of. Suppose there was a law against it, and his life was threatened, should he, by heeding the decree, or at least pretending to heed it, by seeming not to pray, give those heathen the impression that he was afraid to trust in God? Should he allow them to believe that the king of the Medes and Persians was greater than that King of the universe? What a fearful denial of God that would have been! If he had done so, we may be sure that his life would not have been saved.

How naturally the counsel of expediency comes forward in such times. Some may have said: ‘There is no need of deliberately putting your head into the lion’s mouth. You know the decree; it is unchangeable; if you continue to pray as you have been in the habit of doing, you will be virtually committing suicide. You do not need to violate your conscience at all; the decree does not say that you must make petitions to the king instead of God; you will be all safe if you will simply omit praying for a month; that will not be idolatry. Or, if you *must* pray to God, why then, *think* your prayer in your own mind as you go about your work, without opening your lips, or after you go to bed. In the dark you can even move your lips and frame words silently, and nobody will be the wiser.’ Thus argues even professed Christians today!

If such temptations did not come to Daniel, he was more than human; but Daniel was not affected by all that. Daniel knew the Lord. Daniel would not dishonour his King for fear of what one of his fellow-subjects with the title of king might do to him. In the first place he knew that he would not be safe thirty days without prayer. Even if instead of threatening death to all who should make the request of anyone except himself, the king had offered the highest possible rewards and the protection of his kingdom to those who would not ask anything of any other, Daniel would not be safe. We may recall Daniel who walked with the Lord. A test came upon him when the king made a decree that none shall pray to any divine but to the king. Daniel was not affected, for he knew the Lord. Even if the king were to be taken to have promised the highest possible reward and protection, Daniel would not be safe. “It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in princes” (Psalm 118:9). “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.” “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for its help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, which made heaven and earth, the sea and all that therein is; which keepeth truth for ever” (Psalm 146:3, 5-6).

What is a god good for, that cannot save in times of trouble? Strange that professed Christians, who pity the poor heathen who worship gods that can do nothing, will, when danger threatens, act as though the God whom they profess to serve were like the gods of the heathen. That is just when God’s power is seen at its best. “God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). There was never a time in the world when Daniel needed to pray more than when that decree went forth against prayer. And since he was sent to Babylon as a witness for God, he needed above all things to avoid giving the impression that his God was not able to keep him. What is a witness good for, if he doesn’t give straight testimony when others are swearing falsely? Let all Adventists, by the grace of God, walk with the Lord, and in time of trial or trouble be a true witness for God.

There was nothing of the bravado about Daniel. He did not bluster. He did not tell what he should do in spite of the decree of the king. He did not prate about his 'rights.' He quietly did what was right, without making any unnecessary display. He did not change his custom. We can be sure in stating that if Daniel had been in the habit of praying with his windows shut, no doubt he would have continued praying with them shut after the decree was signed. He would not open them to parade his devotions, nor to show his defiance of the king's decree. But he would not change his habit, and shut them, now that praying was declared unlawful. That would have shown lack of confidence in his God; and it was trust in God, not defiance of the king, that moved Daniel. Of the purity of Daniel's character, the Lord says: "Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter: they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness" (Ezekiel 14:20).

Daniel was intimately acquainted with the Lord. He was accustomed to talk with Him, and when he prayed, he expected to have his prayer answered. And God did not disappoint him. Read the story in the second chapter of Daniel. King Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed a dream, and had forgotten it, and he asked his professional wise men to recall the dream for him, and to tell him what it meant. Of course they could not do it. Then the king ordered them all to be put to death as a set of frauds and impostors. Daniel did not know anything about this affair until the officers came to take him to execution with the rest, when he said: "Why is the decree so hasty about the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel. Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would show the king the interpretation" (Daniel 2:15-16). A bold promise that. If Daniel failed after that, his fate would be worse than that of the others. But he knew that he should not fail, for he was acquainted with his God. There was no presumption in his promise to make known the dream and its interpretation. He knew what he would do. He at once went to his house, and joined with his three companions in prayer to God; and the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. There was a good understanding between God and Daniel, and that was why Daniel would not pay any attention to a decree forbidding him to pray to God. What a grand thing to be so well acquainted with the God that made heaven and earth! We may be of as close intimacy with God as Daniel was; we shall find that He is near for all things that we call upon Him for. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even for ever." "The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in time of trouble. And they that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee; for Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee" (Psalms 125:1-2; 9:9-10).

In ancient Babylon, in the person of Daniel, God left not Himself without witness. He bore witness directly to Nebuchadnezzar, in the dream of the great image, and its interpretation by Daniel. Again when that empire was on the brink of ruin, God, by the handwriting on the wall of the palace, bore a last parting witness to the lascivious king Belshazzar (Daniel 5:27-28). The power of Media and Persia came after, and through that power, also, God again bore witness of Himself "unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth." Daniel, the servant of God, was cast into a den of lions, and came forth unhurt, because the Lord sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths that they should do him no hurt. "Then King Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth," that the God of Daniel "is the living God, and steadfast forever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end" (Daniel 6:25-26).

Many even among Seventh-day Adventists deny the God of Daniel. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof," is the description of the mass of people in the last days. A form of godliness, without power, is like salt that has lost its savour. It is absolutely worthless. Now there is no power but of God; the indwelling Spirit of Christ is the only thing that makes a profession of religion of any value. Religion according to law is therefore only a lifeless form. Why then should one who knows the Lord bother himself in the least as to what the laws of the land say about religion? How can one who is acquainted with the substance busy himself with what at best is only a shadow? Rather preach the Gospel in the power of the Spirit of Christ, and all who accept it will have both the form and the power. As for those who know not the power, they are in a more hopeful condition without the form than with it.