

Sunday School Lesson
“Stories of Faith” Series
Lesson 3: The Lion’s Den

Opening Thoughts:

An often-misunderstood story, the tale of “Daniel in the Lion’s Den” is often a common story told to children about staying strong in faith. However, looking deeper we find a story that is not only about faith, but one about calm and discernment in times of crisis. Daniel is in the den with the lions but suffers no harm. He keeps his head and is ready when the king returns.

1. When have you heard the story of the lion’s den?
2. How do you remain calm during times of stress and anxiety?
3. When have you been cast aside and left behind?

Please open with a time of prayer.

Background:

Within the canon of the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Daniel is the primary apocalyptic work. Similar in scope to Revelation in the New Testament, Daniel is centered around the difficulty faced by the people in exile. However, this is not a single layered story. Daniel is generally thought to have been written during the Hellenistic period, sometime between 400 and 150 BCE. This was an era in which the nation had returned from exile but was struggling for identity considering the Greek, Persian, and Egyptian influence. The writer of Daniel takes the struggle of the exilic era and retells the story to encourage and lift the people in their current situation.

While the story of the Fiery Furnace occurs in the Babylonian years, the story of Daniel and the Lion’s Den occurs after the Persian empire conquers Babylon. While the Persians were mostly tolerant of outside religious groups, eventually allowing Jewish people to return to Judah, not all their rulers followed this guideline. As found in the book of Esther and here in Daniel, some rulers were outright hostile to the Jewish faith and their leaders.

In our story today, Daniel is accused of subverting the king and ordered to pay homage to the Persian King. When Daniel refuses, he is sentenced to execution by animal. This was a real historical punishment by many ancient cultures. When locked in for the night, Daniel remains calm and prays to God. The lions do not touch him. The king, however, has a nightmare and is worried about Daniel so much that he orders his release.

1. When you face a crisis, why is it important to remain calm?
2. Why do most of us react with anxiety instead of calm? How does that change our reaction?
3. What is the more important: Daniel’s faithfulness, Daniel’s calm, or Daniel’s patience?

Main Passage: Daniel 6:16-24

¹⁶Then the king gave the command, and Daniel was brought and thrown into the den of lions. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you faithfully serve, deliver you!” ¹⁷A 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, so that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel.

¹⁸Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no food was brought to him, and sleep fled from him. ¹⁹Then, at break of day, the king got up and hurried to the den of lions. ²⁰When he came near the den where Daniel was, he cried out anxiously to Daniel, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you faithfully serve been able to deliver you from the lions?” ²¹Daniel then said to the king, “O king, live forever! ²²My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths so that they would not hurt me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no wrong.” ²³Then 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. ²⁴The king gave a command, and those who had accused Daniel were brought and thrown into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. Before they reached the bottom of the den the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

1. What is the main point of this passage? What stands out?
2. How is the power of God revealed in this passage?
3. How is Daniel a good example of faithfulness? What can we learn?

Reflection:

There are two ways in which people react to crisis and difficulty:

- Anxiety
- Calm

Situationally, it can change as well. What makes one person anxious is not a big deal for someone else. For Daniel, the encounter with the Persian King leads to a profound moment of trial. Personally, I do not know if I could either remain calm or not lose all control upon hearing the sentence. Daniel, however, does. When the king has him thrown into the pit, the lions never touch him. Daniel remains calm, remains faithful, and is focused on the things of God, even as he is facing profound difficulty.

This is a lesson we can all learn. God calls us to serve and love our neighbor. In the moment, however, our worry and anxiety can keep us from doing so. Instead, we fall back on our preferences and safe understandings. Rather than staying calm in the lion’s den, we escape the den entirely and flee. Daniel shows us that it is possible to be both calm and faithful, especially in difficult times.

1. What do we learn about God from this story?
2. What do we learn about ourselves?
3. When have you needed to be calm? What happened?