

Title: "Living Faith In A Hostile Environment"

Text: Daniel 6, Hebrews 11:32-40

We are currently finishing up our sermon series on "Living Faith in 3D"

- exploring how to grasp "how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is."
- But we are focusing now on the deep part.
- How do we experience God's love when we are in the deep, dark valleys of life?

The experience of Exile was a deep, dark valley for the people of Israel back around 600BC.

- And we are spending some time with Daniel, because He was one of those who was carted off into exile in Babylon.
- Last week we saw that he was among a number of young Jewish men, who were selected for a 3 year program to be trained to work in service to the King of Babylon.

We saw how difficult it was for him to learn to navigate his new life in the culture of Babylon while staying faithful to his God, and to himself, and to his people.

Babylon wanted to "Babylonianize" him.

- He wanted to be a faithful Jew, while at the same time using this opportunity to serve in Babylon as a witness to God and a man of influence in that culture.
- He is a model for us of how to live as faithful Christians in the culture in which we live all these years later.

Well, today we come in on Daniel much later in his life.

- He has actually served the King of Babylon with excellence and integrity for many years, and even outlived him.
- He then served the King's son for a number of years until the Persians and Medes came in and conquered Babylon.
- Now Daniel is continuing to serve in government, but under the new ruler, King Darius the Mede.
- Listen to what happens.

So Daniel is now an older man.

- He is kind of an elder statesmen in the government of Babylon.

-He is kind of a John McCain.

-He has served his government with integrity for many, many years, and has served under many kings (or in McCain's case, many presidents.)

And Daniel has this reputation for being incorruptible.

-Verse 4 here says that no one could find any grounds for charges against Daniel, because there was no corruption in him. He was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.

-Would that there were more people serving in government like that!

But as you can see from this passage, such people were just as hard to find in 539BC as they are today.

And it's rather amazing, that in Daniel's case, even a new King of a foreign empire, who has conquered Babylon, -has quickly found in Daniel a man he can respect and rely on.

In fact, one of the most striking things about this passage,

-is how much King Darius the Mede actually likes Daniel.

-He likes him so much that it says in verse 3 that he had it in mind to raise him up to be the ruling governor of the whole province.

That's what ends up causing the conflict in this passage.

-Daniel is currently one of three primary administrators of the province,

-and they have jurisdiction over 120 Satraps who were subordinate government officials.

But when the word leaked out that this new King Darius had taken a liking to Daniel,

-and was planning to elevate him to be the sole governor over everyone else,

-well, that caused a good bit of discontent.

You know how these things go among the "ruling class."

-There is jealousy, and backbiting, and posturing and maneuvering.

-There are power plays and backroom deals.

And the trouble with Daniel was two-fold:

1. First, he wasn't beholden to anyone.
 - He wasn't in the pocket of any of the Babylonian power blocs.
 - He didn't play the power game, and he couldn't be bought, bribed, or manipulated.

Which is probably why King Darius was so drawn to Daniel.

- But it's also why many of the rest of the ruling class of Babylon were dismayed at having him become governor.
- They couldn't control or manipulate him.

2. And the second thing they had against Daniel is that he was a Jew.

- The government types had done their very best to "Babylonianize" Daniel all those years,
- but he still was a faithful Jew.
- He would never just drop that stuff.

And he would never just "fit in" to the culture around him.

- He wouldn't go to the pagan temples to celebrate the gods of Babylon.
- He wouldn't go to the cultural feasts and celebrations and eat the food sacrificed to idols.

And he was so good at his job that he made everyone else look bad.

So when the news leaks out that King Darius the Mede has a

- plan to make Daniel the head honcho of the Province,
- some of the other administrators and satraps get together and hatch a backroom deal to get rid of Daniel,
- And to get rid of him in such a way that it is King Darius himself who will have to make it happen.

It says in verse 5 that they say, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

So they come up with a plan to go to King Darius and appeal to his own ego, and perhaps his own insecurities.

-After all, he is the new king in town, and he probably knows that he doesn't have the undivided loyalty of all those who served and honored the previous king and empire.

So these administrators and satraps go to him and ask him to issue an edict and enforce the decree,
-that anyone who prays to any other god or man other than him during the next 30 days be thrown into the lion's den.

And they urge him to put it in writing so that it cannot be altered nor repealed as was the way with the kingly decrees of the Medes and the Persians.

King Darius thinks this is a fine idea, and is delighted that his administrators and satraps are so loyal to him that they would come up with such an idea.

He doesn't know this is a ruse to manipulate him into getting rid of the one administrator he likes the best.

-In fact, the little group who hatched this plan and went to the King assure him that this idea is the will of all the administrators and all the satraps of the land.

But that is a lie, of course.

-For in fact, we know full well no one ran this idea by Daniel, and he was one of the three chief administrators.

-There were probably any number of other satraps and officials who had no knowledge of this plan either.

But the little group who go to the king assure him it is the will of all his government officials.

-So the King issues the decree and signs the edict into law, and they have it published all over the province, if not the whole empire.

And then this little group of conspirators goes and hangs out at Daniel's house with a drone and a camera.

-Because they know that Daniel has a daily practice of setting aside three times a day for prayer to his God.

-And when he prays, he opens the window of his prayer room that faces toward Israel and Jerusalem,
-and he bows down in prayer to YHWH, asking for help.

And they know full well he is not going to change his practice of prayer in the face of this new edict.

-Just like they said back in verse 5, when it comes to the laws of Daniel's God, he will be faithful no matter what the laws of Babylon might say.

So they catch him in the act.

-He opens his window and bows down to pray, and they are there with their drone and its camera to take a number of 8X10 glossies to show to the King.

And that is what they do. They may not have had 8X10 glossies,

-but they go to the king and inform him that Daniel has broken the law of the latest edict,

-and must be punished for it just as was stated in the decree.

It is then that light dawns on Marblehead for King Darius.

-He sees these men for what they are,

-and he sees the plot that they have hatched to entrap Daniel,

-and he sees how they have manipulated him into serving their own political ends.

And he knows that he is bound by the law that he himself has decreed,

-but it says that he spent that day greatly distressed and making every effort to rescue Daniel until sundown.

And when he was unsuccessful in repealing his own law, he had to give the order for Daniel to be thrown into the lion's den at sunset.

-But as he gave the order, he said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you."

Then the king went home and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment, and without being able to sleep.

-He was grieving the mess these men had made of his life, -and grieving the loss of the one man in the government whom he trusted.

It was a sad state of affairs.

-Though you can imagine that the conspirators were all out celebrating that night and enjoying their political victory.

But the next morning at daybreak, the King is up and out the door and making straight for the lion's den.

-And he is anxious to see whether, in fact, Daniel's God has come to Daniel's aid and rescued him.

So he calls out, and listen to what he says!

"Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually been able to rescue you from the lions?"

And what is his surprise, when Daniel calls back,

"O king, live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king."

And the king was overjoyed, it says, and the conspirator's party was brought to an end.

-King Darius had the men who had hatched this plot brought before him, and he had them thrown into the lion's den themselves, along with their wives and children!

And those lions were hungry. It was probably not a pretty sight.

And Darius issued another decree for the entire kingdom, proclaiming that everyone in the whole kingdom must honor the God of Daniel.

"For He is the living God and he endures forever. His kingdom will not be destroyed and his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

So it's a great story, and we all love a happy ending where the good guy gets rescued and the bad guys get what's coming to them.

-But what does that story have to do with your life and mine?

Well, Daniel is a model for us of what living as a “faithful presence” in a broken world looks like.

-And he models what a writer named Mark Greene calls the “6M’s of Fruitfulness.”

1. Modeling godly character
2. Making good work
3. Ministering grace and love
4. Molding culture
5. (Being a) Mouthpiece for truth and justice
6. (Being a) Messenger of the gospel

Daniel was not trying to save the world.

-He wasn’t trying to call all of Babylon to repentance and faith.

-He was simply an exile trying to live as a faithful presence in a pagan culture.

-And as such, he set aside three times each day to pray to God and ask for help.

-In between those times he went about his day seeking to live out these “6 M’s” given the opportunities he had,

-and in spite of the opposition he faced.

It wasn’t always easy, and sometimes he got thrown to the lions.

-But he trusted and experienced that God was with him.

-He discovered that God’s love was wide and long and high and deep, and could be experienced no matter what circumstances he encountered.

And amazingly enough, his perseverance and continual service to his God ultimately was a wonderful witness to the grace and glory of God.

And even when Daniel got thrown to the lions, it ended up being a witness to the world that Daniel’s God:

-rescues and he saves;

-he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth.

-And can even save his servants like Daniel from the power of the lions.

That is good news for all of us, too.

-And it makes me ask myself:

- Does my life reveal to others that God is alive and real?
- Does my life display God's power to rescue and save?
- Does my life show that God's Kingdom is eternal and is worth living for?

In the midst of a modern world of schemers and conspirators,

- of power brokers and political posturing,
- of back room deals and competing interests,
- I want to begin setting aside regular times to pray and ask for help,
- and then trust God to actually help me to:

1. Model godly character
2. Make good work
3. Minister grace and love
4. Mold culture right here in Malden
5. (Be a) Mouthpiece for truth and justice
6. (And a) Messenger of the gospel in word and deed.

Let's pray.