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Carrie Gleeson
The Wonder of His Rescue | Daniel 6

A few years ago, I came face-to-face with a moose. It was a beautiful, sunny, July morning in Winter Park, Colorado, and I was hiking with three of my friends. We went out at about 6:00 in the morning because we wanted to find said moose, and there he was, in our path...this big Bull Moose, standing there, staring at us. And I don't know if any of you have encountered a moose before, but they're not the best animal to come in contact with in the wilderness. Moose are incredibly territorial, and they get irritated with just the slightest bit of someone creeping into their space. So, we stood there staring, Mr. Moose, and my friends, and me. We started backing up nice and slow to make sure that the moose knew, "We aren't here to mess with you. We'll leave now. It's no big problem." And we bolted out of there.

By the time we got home, we had called or texted, I'm pretty sure, everyone in our phonebooks to tell them that we came in contact with a moose. We knew a moose. We came nose-to-nose with a moose is how the story finally ended. We were that close to a moose. I love telling this story. If you know me, I've probably told this story to you 14 times before. But this story, in my life, years later, is just a story. It really has no bearing on my life. It really doesn't affect me in any way. It's now a fun story that I tell about a crazy adventure on a morning hike. I can tell it to you with a smile on my face. I promise you, I did not have a smile on my face that morning when I ran into that moose. But so often, I feel like that's the way that certain Bible stories go with us. We learn certain stories from the time we are this big, and over the years, a lot of time, they just lose their luster. We don't really fully understand what the stories mean, and they really have no bearing on our lives. And I think that the story of Daniel and the lion's den is the same way, because if you're anything like me, you think that Daniel and the lion's den looks like this (shows slide), when the reality of the story is nothing like this. Daniel did not cozy up with some lions and become friends with them and was a lion whisperer. Daniel had a very real, very tangible, and glorious encounter with the living God through being thrown into a lion's den.

So, my hope and my prayer for us this morning, is that we can relearn the story of Daniel with new eyes, and hear a new message from our living God. But we're going to have to travel back a little bit before chapter six, which is where Daniel encounters the lions, so that we have a full understanding of what's going on in this story. The Babylonian Empire is taking control of all of the Middle East at this point—all of the known world at that time. And in chapter one, verse one, we learn what is happening to the people of Israel. The Bible says,

¹ In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it. [Daniel 1:1]

So right away, in the very first verse, we learn that Daniel and the rest of God's people have been taken by the Babylonians from their home in Jerusalem to Babylon. They are captives, now under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar. But we also learn a little bit about what Babylon is like. Babylon was a self-indulgent, self-absorbed culture. Today, we might look at it like this (shows slide). It was a society that was completely run by consumerism, commercialism, and political corruption. The religion of self was how everyone lived. The Babylonians were driven by wealth, and greed, and pride.

Scholars believe that Daniel was around 17 when he was taken from Jerusalem to Babylon. At 17-years-old, Daniel was thrust into this new society that is totally self-absorbed, self-indulgent, and corrupt. And not only is he thrust into this society as a citizen, but he's asked by the king to come work for him. So, at 17, Daniel begins working for the king. And although the king ate only the finest Babylonian fare, the Bible tells us that,

⁸ Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. [Daniel 1:8]

In chapter one, we learn what this teenager decided to do. This teenager, who was thrown into this brand-new society that was so corrupt, said no. Daniel said *I want to continue following my God, and that means that I can't do the things that you want me to do. I will not defile myself based on the Law of Moses. Based on God's law. I can't do those things. I can't sit at the king's table. I can't eat all of that food because God has asked me not to, and I want to remain faithful to my God, even though I am in this foreign land.* That meant that he didn't get to hear what was going on between all of the chiefs, all of the administrators, all of the government officials. It meant that he didn't get to indulge himself. It meant that he was far away from the gossip. Far away from knowing what the business was because he wanted to pursue his relationship with God.

The story and life of Daniel goes on. And we are going to pick it up in chapter six. At this time, Daniel is about 80-years-old. He has now spent the majority of his life working for the king, gaining favor with the king, being trusted by the king. And now, there's a new king. The Babylonian Empire has been taken over by the Medes and Persians, and King Darius is on the throne. In chapter six, verse one it says,

¹ Darius the Mede decided to divide the kingdom into 120 provinces, and he appointed a high officer to rule over each province. ² The king also chose Daniel and two other administrators to supervise the high officials and protect the king's interest. ³ Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers. Because of Daniel's great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire. ⁴ Then, the other administrators and high officers began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling government affairs, but they couldn't find anything to criticize or condemn. He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy. [Daniel 6:1-4]

For 64 years, Daniel lived in a foreign land as a captive, working for the king, and for 64 years he remained faithful. He was always responsible and completely trustworthy. That's a big deal.

⁵ So, they concluded, "Our only chance (of finding grounds for accusing Daniel) is his religion!" ⁶ They decided to go to the king and say, "King Darius, live forever! ⁷ We presidents, governors, counselors, and deputies have unanimously decided that you should make a law, irrevocable under any circumstance, that for the next thirty days anyone who asks a favor of God or man—except from you, Your Majesty—shall be thrown to the lions." ⁸ Your Majesty, we request your signature on this law; sign it so that it cannot be canceled or changed; it will be a 'law of the Medes and Persians' that cannot be revoked." ⁹ So, King Darius signed the law. [Daniel 6:5-9]

They go to the king. They appeal to his own sense of ego, his own vanity, and say, "You really should do this. You really should have everyone bow down to you." And he says, "Alright. Let's do it."

¹⁰ But though Daniel knew about it, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs bedroom, with its windows open toward Jerusalem, and prayed three times a day, just as he always had, giving thanks to his God. ¹¹ Then the men thronged to Daniel's house and found him praying there, asking favors of his God. ¹² They rushed back to the king and reminded him about his law. "Haven't you signed a decree," they demanded, "that permits no petitions to any God or man—except you—for thirty days? And anyone disobeying will be thrown to the lions?" "Yes," the king replied, "it is 'a law of the Medes and Persians,' that cannot be altered or revoked." ¹³ Then they told the king, "That fellow Daniel, one of the Jewish captives, is paying no attention to you or your law. He is asking favors of his God three times a day." ¹⁴ Hearing this, the king was very angry with himself for signing the law and determined to save Daniel. He spent the rest of the day trying to think of some way to get Daniel out of this predicament. ¹⁵ In the evening the men came again to the king and said, "Your Majesty, there is nothing you can do. You signed the law, and it cannot be changed." ¹⁶ So at last the king gave the order for Daniel's arrest, and he was taken to the den of lions. The king said to him, "May your God, whom you worship continually, deliver you." And then they threw him in. [Daniel 6:10-16]

So, the officials went to his house, knocked on the door, and arrested him. I am so curious as to how Daniel responded to that. Was he scared? Was he anxious? Did he tremble with fear? Did he just surrender? What was that walk like on the way to the den of lions? He knew what he was getting into.

I've been on two safaris in Africa. The first safari did not have lions as a part of it because lions are dangerous. So, not every safari in Africa has lions. They're uncontrollable, they're hard to deal with, and they're lions. So, my second safari had

lions, and we got in our truck. We were more in the wagon part of this truck, and the only thing that separated us from the outside world, from the African wilderness, was a piece of vinyl—so, I felt real safe—and nothing else. So, we start our trek through the safari and into the lion's area. And I'm telling you, it was like what I'm assuming it would be like to walk through the gates of Jurassic Park. There were so many electric fences and gates that we had to go through to get into the lion's den. That's really fun to do in a truck where a piece of fabric is all that separates you from the rest of the world. And we got up to the watering hole where the lions were, and there were three female lions and a male. We stopped our car just a few yards away from where they were and just watched them. We had been told by our guide that we couldn't make any noise when we got there, and we were instructed to turn off the flashes on cameras and turn down the volumes on our phones as we took pictures, because the clicks and the flashes could annoy and irritate them. If they get irritated or agitated, you don't want to be around them. A click of a camera is what could irritate them. So, I'm guessing that a man being thrown into their den would really agitate and irritate them. As we sat there staring at these majestic creatures, our guide gave us this hand motion of, "Be quiet right now," because he had lost one of them; one of them wasn't around the watering hole anymore. Around us the grass was tall, and the lions just ducked down in it. And soon enough, we realized that all four of the lions were not where we had last seen them. They were all starting to make a circle around our truck.

Thankfully, we got out of there just in time. Me and animals and going on hikes! And I remember looking back as we were driving away, and the one lion that they could never find, followed us all the way, like she was escorting us out, or something was going to happen. My heart was pounding so fast. I was making plans in my head of what was going to happen if my parents had to be called and told I was in a hospital or worse, in South Africa. It was scary just for that moment. It makes me wonder what it would be like, and what Daniel would think or do, or how he would feel, in that moment, and would he be comforted by his faith? This was a man that three times a day for over 64 years, spent time in prayer. This was a man who had an intimate relationship with God. He trusted God. He knew God's character. But does that automatically extinguish the fear that he could have had? I don't think so, and I don't think so because the Savior of the world experienced anguish and trepidation in the same way.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, we see Jesus' angst about walking to the cross. He says, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death." Jesus felt that. He trembled. He sweat blood. He felt the actual weight of the sins of the world on Him and He asked for it to be changed. So, because the Savior of the world felt that anguish, I can only imagine what Daniel felt.

Continuing on in verse 17,

¹⁷ A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with that of his government, so that no one could rescue Daniel from the lions. ¹⁸ Then the king returned to his palace and

went to bed without dinner. He refused his usual entertainment and didn't sleep all night. [Daniel 6:17-18]

He brought a stone, and he rolled it in front of the opening of the lion's den so that no one could rescue him. They had him in there, locked. He was not getting out of there. And almost the same scene played out again with Jesus in the New Testament. After Jesus was crucified and died, and placed in a tomb, the Pharisees went to Pontius Pilate and said to him, "We request that you seal the tomb. We want to make sure that this man is gone, he is dead, there is no one there to rescue him." But what does our God do when a stone is placed in front of an opening? When it looks like everything is dead, when it looks like everything is gone, does a stone stop him? When it looks like the situation is impossible to fix, the relationship is beyond mending, the addiction has you so enslaved, the illness looks so grave, the dream looks so forfeited, does that stop our God from moving that stone? From reaching into the mouth of lions and rescuing us and delivering us? I promise you, there is not one situation that our God cannot overcome, that our God cannot enter into, because our God overcame death itself. And I know that sometimes life can be excruciatingly hard, but it doesn't mean that God is any less near or any less powerful or any less involved. He doesn't always deliver us the way we think He should, or the way we want Him to, but that doesn't mean that He won't deliver us.

I can remember standing outside my house one night, looking up at the stars and yelling at God. I had a family member that we prayed for, for over a decade, to be rescued from the lion's den, and finally, I just had had enough. After so many prayers and not seeing anything happen, and in my mind, seeing the situation get worse, I went outside and I said, "Alright, God. We're done. This area of my life—we're done, and I don't need you in it and I don't want you in it. We're done." And God didn't walk away from me that night. God didn't walk away from my family member that night. Yes, my family member did sit in a lion's den for a really long time, but he was delivered from it, and he was delivered in it, as well. And God didn't deliver him because I said something right or did something right. God didn't deliver him because I walked away from God in that moment. God delivered him because of who God is and His character. So, what does it take for us to get to a place where we trust God regardless? Regardless of the outcome. Regardless of the cost. Regardless of what deliverance looks like. Deliverance, for Daniel, wasn't that he didn't have to go to the lion's den. Deliverance for Daniel was that he wasn't alone inside the lion's den, and that he got out, unharmed.

The Bible says, in the story of Daniel, that an angel was with him all night long. God sent an angel. And I wonder for us, if you're sitting in a den of lions right now, are you sitting in there alone? Or do you have people in it with you? Because far too often I feel like we go into these dens of lions, whatever it looks like at whatever season in our lives, and we want to sit there alone. And we don't have anyone in there to help us, to point us to Jesus, to encourage us. And that's what the church is for. We are here to be in this with each other. We don't have to wait alone.

I read this quote last week. It stuck me so deeply I can't even remember who wrote it. It says, "Could God be calling us to slow down and stop living in today's incredibly fast-paced culture? To stop believing that unless we have something now, we will never have it at all? Could God be telling us to trust that He has amazing plans in store for us? Plans that might not look the same as the plans he has for other people. Could it be that God is calling us to a level of trust so deep that we literally have to stop doing anything in our own strength and just wait for Him? To simply be still and know that He is God." Could it be that that's what the message of the story of Daniel is for us this morning?

The story goes on. The next morning the king races down at first light to get to see if Daniel's God rescued him. And he pulls back the stone, and he yells down, "Daniel, son of the living God, did your God save you?" And Daniel was able to yell back and say, "Yes, Your Majesty. My God saved me." Daniel was delivered from the mouths of the lions. And deliverance, for him, and for the rest of this kingdom, meant never going back to business as usual, because that's what deliverance looks like. So, the king made a proclamation:

"To every race, nation, and language throughout the world, peace and prosperity to you. I decree that everyone throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel for he is the living God. And He will endure forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed. And His rule will never end. He rescues and saves his people. He performs miraculous signs and wonders in the heavens and on Earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lion's den."

[Daniel 6:25-27]

My prayer for us this morning is that this is not a story that has no effect on us. That this is not a story that we recall in a couple years, and think of it as a nice adventure on a hike one morning in Colorado. My prayer is that we allow this story to transform us, because deliverance means never going back to business as usual. And my prayer is that we look at the life of Daniel. We look at his habits, his daily rhythms, and we say, *Okay. If I could take one step, make one difference in my life, and it meant that I started these holy habits, what would that look like for me?* It doesn't mean that you will never go to a den of lions ever again. Praying three times a day, praying when you're told not to, does not mean you will never have to face the lions again, but maybe it means that when you're in those situations, and in those times, life will look different on the inside for you.

I love this story. I love the story of God's deliverance. And I love, even though it's odd and sometimes a stretch to compare it and put it in the season of Advent, that it shows the story of God's deliverance, and goodness, and faithfulness to His people in the same way that Jesus' story shows God' faithfulness, and deliverance, and goodness to His people. Because God chose to leave heaven, and come to Earth in the most helpless form He could, as an infant, so that He could learn and grow just like you and me. And then go to the cross and die for your sins, for my sins, for the sins of every human that has ever walked the earth, so that we can be set free, so that we can know Him intimately, so that we can be delivered. It's a beautiful story. And I pray that this

Advent season, you will see it differently. That you will walk out these next four weeks with the ability to pause from the distractions, and the shopping, and the parties...so that you can experience the hope of the coming Savior.

Let's pray.

Jesus, we are so grateful that You are a God who rescues us. You are a God who sees us. You are a God who is with us. Even if we can't see You, You are present. Help us to know that, God. Help us to be a people who trust You. Help us to be a people who see Your goodness. Jesus, thank You for this season and for what it means. Thank You for coming to Earth to set us free. In Your name we pray. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.