

LIPHOOK METHODIST CHURCH
SUNDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2015, 10am
NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US 2 – DANIEL

Readings: Daniel 6:10-23; Luke 8:1-8.

What would you do?

For 30 days the law says you're not allowed to pray to any god or person except the king.

What do you do?:

Let's make it multiple choice

- a. You obey the law, you skip church, you skip your personal prayers for a month
- b. You take your religious practices underground; when you say your prayers you make sure you are indoors with the curtains closed, preferably on your own in your room
- c. You make sure your personal prayers are in secret but you also make private and secret arrangements to meet other Christians and members of the church in private houses hoping that no one's an informer
- d. Do everything as usual: attend church, do your private prayers with open curtains and the lights on ...

Take a poll, perhaps run through again as reminder ...

That's the situation Daniel was in.

It registers quite high on a religious persecution scale. The court officials had deliberately persuaded the king to bring in this decree in order to trap Daniel because they didn't like him. They didn't like him because he was successful and good at his job as a high ranking Civil Servant even though he was one of the captive exiles from Judea. They persecuted him because of his religion – it was because of his faithfulness to God that he

had been able to be successful and good at his job. He somewhat put the Babylonian officials in the shade by his abilities.

There are many people around the world who live under similar persecution. But it's not just a month.

I think in Daniel's position, facing a month when religious practices were illegal I would keep my head down, find a quiet corner where I wouldn't be observed and hope they didn't get the evidence.

But then, do you remember the old question, "If you were tried for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

Daniel not only stayed faithful he made sure he was seen to stay faithful.

I wonder what he hoped for.

Did he think they'd be shamed into withdrawing the law?

Did he think the king would find a legal loophole?

Or find a way to repeal his foolish legislation?

Did he think God would intervene directly and hold him up above the lions' heads so they couldn't reach him to tear him apart?

Did he think God would give him the strength, or skill to tame the lions?

Did he think God would do as he did and shut the mouths of the lions all night?

When he was thrown into the lions' den I wonder what went through his mind.

Did he think God had left him to fend for himself, that God was a distant God who just wanted loyalty but didn't look after his people or couldn't look after his people?

Did he think he'd got God all wrong and perhaps there was no one there, no one listening, that all those prayers just hit the ceiling and bounced back?

Did he wonder where the love of God, or even the justice of God, had got to if this could be allowed?

Daniel didn't have the benefit of reading St Paul. He didn't have the benefit of meeting Jesus or even knowing about Jesus. Daniel's resources for his faithfulness were his knowledge of the Jewish scriptures (the OT), his own prayers, his visions and his knowledge of God's track record with him. Daniel was far from home, singing the Lord's song in a strange land.

That's how those same exiles put it in Psalm 137, – how can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? Far from Jerusalem felt far from God.

But Daniel remained faithful. Paul's comments at the end of Romans 8 could have been commentary on Daniel's situation, just as they could be on others whom we'll look at in this series.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

'For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'

I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God

Thankfully we don't have to face anything quite so bad as Daniel. There are many around the world who face some of those things and people

who face those things as Christians and sometimes because they're Christians:

trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword

In Liphook they're not common, though many of our neighbours as well as ourselves might describe some of our situations as trouble or hardship.

There may also be times when we have difficult choices to make; decisions to take about how public we are about our faith in certain situations when consequences might be uncomfortable.

And sometimes we just face difficulties, hardship, trials and tribulations and perhaps we think it would be easier if we didn't have these Christian principles that keep our behaviour to the right side of the law.

Or maybe with think sometimes that life would be easier, more fun or less busy if we didn't have the Christian moral obligations or moral behaviour to restrict us.

And perhaps sometimes we give in; maybe sometimes we take what seems the easy route; I suspect that we don't always keep to those Christian principles.

Sometimes it is easier to keep our heads down, stay inconspicuous, hope nobody notices us go with the crowd do the things everybody else does.

But that's when we also hope someone else doesn't notice; that's when we're saying "don't look at me now God"; that's when we've not done just as we have before – as Daniel did who got down on his knees three times a day by his open window that faced Jerusalem.

It's when we go with the crowd, when we hope we won't be picked out as a faithful follower of Jesus; that's when we know that our belief in Paul's statement that nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ is faltering.

Let's look at it the other way round.

What did King Darius think he was doing?

He was fairly stupid to be taken in and issue the decree in the first place but when he realised what was going on he did all he could to save Daniel. But the Law of the Medes and Persians cannot be altered. So Daniel was thrown into the lions' den.

I don't mean what did Darius think he was doing then. I mean what did he think he was doing the following morning?

Why did he go to the lions' den that morning?

What made him call out?

When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, 'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?'

Why did he think there may be anyone there alive?

Surely he must have seen something of the love and faithfulness of God?

Surely he hadn't only seen the faithfulness of Daniel?

He must have had some idea that Daniel's God whom he so faithfully served was powerful and loving and faithful to his servants.

As we heard, there were others who approached a cave in the early hours of the morning expecting only to find someone who was dead. They too

were unexpectedly greeted by a voice from a place that should have been silent:

`Why do you look for the living among the dead?

Surely you must know that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So hold tight, God is faithful, whatever the situation, whatever the temptation, hold tight, underneath are the everlasting arms, his love will not let us go.

Amen.