**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**DANIEL-006. FAITH STOPPING THE MOUTHS OF LIONS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"16. Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee. 17. And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel. 18. Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him. 19. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. 20. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? 21. Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. 22. My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before Him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt, 23. Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God. 24. And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den. 25. Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. 26. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for He is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end. 27. He delivereth and rescueth, and He worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. 28. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian."*

*Daniel 6:16-28*

Daniel was verging on ninety when this great test of his faithfulness was presented to him. He had been honoured and trusted through all the changes in the kingdom, and, when the Medo-Persian conquest came, the new monarch naturally found in him, as a foreigner, a more reliable minister than in native officials. Envy doth merit as its shade pursue, and the crafty trick by which his subordinates tried to procure his fall, was their answer to Darius's scheme of making him prime minister. Our passage begins in the middle of the story, but the earlier part will come into consideration in the course of our remarks.

**I. We note, first, the steadfast, silent confessor and the weak king.**

Darius is a great deal more conspicuous in the narrative than Daniel. The victim of injustice is silent. He does not seem to have been called on to deny or defend the indictment. His deed was patent, and the breach of the law flagrant. He, too, was like a sheep before the shearers, dumb. His silence meant, among other things, a quiet, patient, fixed resolve to bear all, and not to deny his God. Weak men bluster. Heroic endurance has generally little to say. Without resistance, or a word, the old man, an hour ago the foremost in the realm, is hauled off and flung into the pit or den. It is useless and needless to ask its form. The entrance was sealed with two seals, one the king's, one the conspirators, that neither party might steal a march on the other. Fellows in iniquity do not trust each other. So, down in the dark there, with the glittering eyeballs of the brutes round him, and their growls in his ears, the old man sits all night long, with peace in his heart, and looking up trustfully, through the hole in the roof, to his Protector's stars, shining their silent message of cheer.

The passage dwells on the pitiable weakness and consequent unrest of the king. He had not yielded Daniel to his fate without a struggle, which the previous narrative describes in strong language. Sore displeased, he set his heart on delivering him, and laboured to do so. The curious obstacle, limiting even his power, is a rare specimen of conservatism in its purest form. So wise were our ancestors, that nothing of theirs shall ever be touched. Infallible legislators can make immutable laws; the rest of us must be content to learn by blundering, and to grow by changing. The man who says, I never alter my opinions, condemns himself as either too foolish or too proud to learn.

But probably, if the question had been about a law that was inconvenient to Darius himself, or to these advocates of the constitution as it has always been, some way of getting round it would have been found out. If the king had been bold enough to assert himself, he could have walked through the cobweb. But this is one of the miseries of yielding to evil counsels, that one step taken calls for another. In for a penny, in for a pound. Therefore let us all take heed of small compliances, and be sure that we can never say about any doubtful course, Thus far will I go, and no farther. Darius was his servants servant when once he had put his name to the arrogant decree. He did not know the incidence of his act, and we do not know that of ours; therefore let us take heed of the quality of actions and motives, since we are wholly incapable of estimating the sweep of their consequences.

Darius's conduct to Daniel was like Herod's to John the Baptist and Pilate's to Jesus. In all the cases the judges were convinced of the victim's innocence, and would have saved him; but fear of others biassed justice, and from selfish motives, they let fierce hatred have its way. Such judges are murderers. From all come the old lessons, never too threadbare to be dinned into the ears, especially of the young, that to be weak is, in a world so full of temptation, the same as to be wicked, and that he who has a sidelong eye to his supposed interest, will never see the path of duty plainly.

What a feeble excuse to his own conscience was Darius's parting word to Daniel! Thy God, whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee! And was flinging him to the lions the right way to treat a man who served God continually? Or, what right had Darius to expect that any god would interfere to stop the consequences of his act, which he thus himself condemned? We are often tempted to think, as he did, that a divine intervention will come in between our evil deeds and their natural results. We should be wiser if we did not do the things that, by our own confession, need God to avert their issues.

But that weak parting word witnessed to the impression made by the lifelong consistency of Daniel. He must be a good man who gets such a testimony from those who are harming him. The busy minister of state had done his political work so as to extort that tribute from one who had no sympathy with his religion. Do we do ours in that fashion? How many of our statesmen serve God continually and obviously in their public life?

What a contrast between the night passed in the lions den and the palace! Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage, and soft beds and luxurious delights of sense bring no ease to troubled consciences. Daniel is more at rest, though his soul is among lions, than Darius in his palace. Peter sleeps soundly, though the coming morning is to be his last. Better to be the victim than the doer of injustice!

The verdict of nightly thoughts on daily acts is usually true, and if our deeds do not bear thinking of on our beds, the sooner we cancel them by penitence and reversed conduct, the better. But weak men are often prone to swift and shallow regrets, which do not influence their future any more than a stone thrown into the sea makes a permanent gap. Why should Darius have waited for morning, if his penitence had moved him to a firm resolution to undo the evil done? He had better have sprung from his bed, and gone with his guards to open the den in the dark. Feeble lamentations are out of place when it is still time to act.

The hurried rush to the den in the morning twilight, and the lamentable voice, so unlike royal impassiveness, indicate the agitation of an impulsive nature, accustomed to let the feeling of the moment sway it unchecked. Absolute power tends to make that type of man. The question thrown into the den seems to imply that its interior was not seen. If so, the half-belief in Daniel's survival is remarkable. It indicates, as before, the impression of steadfast devoutness made by the old man's life, and also a belief that his God was possibly a true and potent divinity.

Such a belief was quite natural, but it does not mean that Darius was prepared to accept Daniel's God as his god. His religion was probably elastic and hospitable enough to admit that other nations might have other gods. But his thoughts about this living God are a strange medley. He is not sure whether He is stronger than the royal lions, and he does not seem to feel that if a god delivers, his own act in surrendering a favoured servant of such a god looks very black. A half-belief blinds men to the opposition between their ways and God's, and to the certain issue of their going in one direction and God in another. If Daniel be delivered, what will become of Darius? But, like most men, he is illogical, and that question does not seem to have occurred to him. Surely this man may sit for a portrait of a weak, passionate nature, in the feebleness of his resistance to evil, the half hopes that wrong would be kept from turning out so badly as it promised, the childish moanings over wickedness that might still have been mended, and the incapacity to take in the grave, personal consequences of his crime.

**II. We next note the great deliverance.**

The king does not see Daniel, and waits in sickening doubt whether any sound but the brutes snarl at the disturber of their feast will be heard. There must have been a sigh of relief when the calm accents were audible from the unseen depth. And what dignity, respect, faith, and innocence are in them! Even in such circumstances the usual form of reverential salutation to the king is remembered. That night's work might have made a sullen rebel of Daniel, and small blame to him if he had had no very amiable feelings to Darius; but he had learned faithfulness in a good school, and no trace of returning evil for evil was in his words or tones.

The formal greeting was much more than a form, when it came up from among the lions. It heaped coals of fire on the king's head, let us hope, and taught him, if he needed the lesson, that Daniel's disobedience had not been disloyalty. The more religion compels us to disregard the authority and practices of others, the more scrupulously attentive should we be to demonstrate that we cherish all due regard to them, and wish them well. How simply, and as if he saw nothing in it to wonder at, he tells the fact of his deliverance! My God has sent His angel, and hath shut the lions mouths. He had not been able to say, as the king did before the den was opened, Thy God will deliver thee; but he had gone down into it, knowing that He was able, and leaving himself in God's care. So it was no surprise to him that he was safe. Thankfulness, but not astonishment, filled his heart. So faith takes God's gifts, however great and beyond natural possibility they may be; for the greatest of them are less than the Love which faith knows to move all things, and whatsoever faith receives is just like Him.

Daniel did not say, as Darius did, that he served God continually, but he did declare his own innocency in God's sight and unimpeachable fidelity to the king. His reference is probably mainly to his official conduct; but the characteristic tone of the Old Testament saint is audible, which ventured on professions of uprightness, accordant with an earlier stage of revelation and religious consciousness, but scarcely congruous with the deeper and more inward sense of sin produced by the full revelation in Christ. But if the tone of the latter part of verse 22 is somewhat strange to us, the historian's summary in verse 23 gives the eternal truth of the matter: No manner of hurt was found upon him, because he had trusted in his God. That is the basis of the reference in Hebrews xi. 33: Through faith ... stopped the mouths of lions.

Simple trust in God brings His angel to our help, and the deliverance, which is ultimately to be ascribed to His hand muzzling the gaping beasts of prey, may also be ascribed to the faith which sets His hand in motion. The true cause is God, but the indispensable condition without which God will not act, and with which He cannot but act, is our trust. Therefore all the great things which it is said to do are due, not to anything in it, but wholly to that of which it lays hold. A foot or two of lead pipe is worth little, but if it is the channel through which water flows into a city, it is priceless.

Faith may or may not bring external deliverances, such as it brought to Daniel; but the good cheer which this story brings us does not depend on these. When Paul lay in Rome, shortly before his martyrdom, the experience of Daniel was in his mind, as he thankfully wrote to Timothy, I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. He adds a hope which contrasts strangely, at first sight, with the clear expectation of a speedy and violent death, expressed a moment or two before (I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come) when he says, The Lord will deliver me from every evil work; but he had learned that it was possible to pass through the evil and yet to be delivered from it, and that a man might be thrown to the lions and devoured by them, and yet be truly shielded from all harm from them. So he adds, And will save me unto His heavenly kingdom, thereby teaching us that the true deliverance is that which carries us into, or something nearer towards, the eternal home. Thus understood, the miracle of Daniel's deliverance is continually repeated to all who partake of Daniel's faith, Thou hast made the Most High thy habitation ... thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder.

The savage vengeance on the conspirators and the proclamation of Darius must be left untouched. The one is a ghastly example of retributive judgment, in which, as sometimes is the case even now, men fall into the pit they have digged for others, and it shows the barbarous cruelty of that gorgeous civilisation. The other is an example of how far a man may go in perceiving and acknowledging the truth without its influencing his heart. The decree enforces recognition of Daniel's God, in language which even prophets do not surpass; but it is all lip-reverence, as evanescent as superficial. It takes more than a fright caused by a miracle to make a man a true servant of the living God.

The final verse of the passage implies Daniel's restoration to rank, and gives a beautiful, simple picture of the old man's closing days, which had begun so long before, in such a different world as Nebuchadnezzar's reign, and closed in Cyrus's, enriched with all that should accompany old age--honour, obedience, troops of friends. When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.