

**Mission Impossible 2 - Life with the Lions - Daniel** (Daniel 6)

Life with the lions – what does that title conjure up with you? Is it perhaps this?

*PLAY RADIO CLIP*

Maybe I got mixed up with my lions! The usual picture, at least for Christians is one of Daniel and the lions like this painting by Reuben's. But let us not get ahead of ourselves. How did Daniel get into this impossible position? For that let us read the beginning of chapter 6 of Daniel, page 890. To fill us in on some of the background, Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, but whom we better know as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, or as I use to remember Shadrach, Meshach and Tobedwego. Why the two lots of names, because Daniel is also known as Belteshazzar, because the four of them were Israelites, but had been taken captive and exiled to Babylon – a common practice at this time when you conquered a place. Daniel and his three friends had done well and because Daniel interpreted a dream for the king he rose up the pecking order in the hierarchy of things and becomes a trusted and treasured part of the royal court. So let us turn to Daniel 6:1

**“It pleased Darius (the Babylonian King) to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss.**

So Daniel is one of three who are just under the king

**Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.**

So now Daniel is set to move to number one under the king. But trouble is brewing

**At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."”** (Daniel 6:1-5 NIV)

As I read this I wondered if I could live up to this scrutiny. They looked at his business affairs – his work place – they could find nothing amiss. Daniel was totally honest and true. He did not even do what we all saw in an office I worked in once as a student where Fred would stand up mid morning, pick up his newspaper and he had a very deep pocket in his trousers as he could put the whole of his tabloid paper in the pocket and he would announce that he was going to the toilet. He would reappear some thirty minutes later, return to his desk, take his newspaper out of his trouser pocket and then return to work. It was also the same office where I was accused of working too fast and that we were all in danger of losing the Saturday morning overtime!

Daniel did none of this. Daniel was working his best for his employer, even though he was a stranger in a foreign land. He was following what Paul wrote many years later

**“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men,”** (Ephesians 6:5-7 NIV)

Could that be said of you at work that you serve wholeheartedly or is it begrudgingly or even like the person who would see work as a place for telling others about God, even if they did not want to listen or it was inappropriate. I can remember when I was teaching that I was employed as a teacher of Physics, first and foremost, although it was natural that my faith, my relationship with God came up with staff and pupils. A colleague at one school was called into the head's office because this colleague was using his maths lessons to preach to the pupils about his faith. He had the best of intentions, the soundest of motives – he wanted all his pupils to be saved and go to heaven, but it was totally inappropriate. He needed to do the best job he could and let his life shine through and when appropriate say something.

Daniel was hard working, using all his talents and gifts for his employer. He was totally honest, totally pure in all his dealings at work, so they had to fix on another plan to try and get rid of Daniel because they could not discredit him. Verse 6 of Daniel 6

**“So the administrators and the satraps went as a group to the king and said: "O King Darius, live for ever! The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den. Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." So King Darius put the decree in writing.**

**Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened towards Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions' den?"**

**The king answered, "The decree stands—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."**

**Then they said to the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day." When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.**

**Then the men went as a group to the king and said to him, "Remember, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed."” (Daniel 6:6-15 NIV)**

Not only had this group been watching Daniel at work, but they had also been watching Daniel at home. They had been looking at his private life and saw if that had any faults in it. Today with those in high office it is said that their private life has no effect on how they run their businesses, carry out their jobs. What was it Ruth Graham-Lotz, daughter of Billy Graham said, shortly after 9-11

**...some of our top elected officials said it doesn't matter what we do in private as long as we do our jobs. And agreeing with them, we said it doesn't matter to me what anyone, including the President, does in private as long as I have a job and the economy is good.** (Anne Graham-Lotz)

It doesn't matter what people do in their private lives – it will not affect their work! Not so for the Babylonians, not so for us. They had scrutinised Daniel's life and they knew where they could get him, they would have to make up a law to get him, but get him they would.

Could our private lives stand up to that much scrutiny? Would someone have to invent a law to trap us? Would someone be so certain of our love of God that it would be this area that we would get trapped in or entrapped in? They knew when he prayed, where he prayed and in the manner in which he prayed. With the window open facing his beloved city of Jerusalem. This was the place where his people had built a great Temple to the one true living God and he was wanting one day to return.

Well for Daniel it was the only way they could get him and so he was hauled before the king, verse 16 of Daniel 6

**“So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.”** (Daniel 6:16-18 NIV)

So Daniel was thrown into the lion's den. This was Mission Impossible – he was bound to die. But we have already seen Daniel's faith. Previously when King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, not the present, lion's den, king, he had wanted the dream interpreted and no-one could so the king ordered all the wise men in the kingdom to be killed including Daniel and his three friends, so Daniel prays about the situation, God talks to him and he goes to the king and when the king says to him

**“..."Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?"**  
(Daniel 2:26 NIV)

Daniel says

**“..."No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a *God in heaven* who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these:"**  
(Daniel 2:27-28 NIV)

For Daniel the bottom line was that he knew that there is a God in heaven. For him that was sufficient. He did not need the nice feelings, or any razzamatazz, not that any of those things are wrong, but when the chips were down, the fact that there is a God in heaven was enough.

Equally when his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are facing the fiery furnace for doing something very similar to why Daniel is in the lion's den now – they too would only worship God and only talk to him. And when the king tells them to recant, to turn away from their God, they reply

**“...”O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”** (Daniel 3:16-18 NIV)

We know God can save us from the flames, but if he does choose to, we still know God and him only will we worship.

Today we may not be asked to worship an idol. Today we may not be asked to stop praying to God and pray to Tony Blair only, or the Queen, but we are still being warped by the world to fit in. Last week Darren said that on adverts we are seen to be no-one's if we do not have the right sunglasses or the trainers with the right logo on them. That is perhaps easy to resist – except those with children going on about them. But in the area of morals – it doesn't matter if we do this or that because everyone else does it. We should no longer say that this or that is wrong because the world says it is alright. The Bible may say it is wrong, but the world says it is OK, so it must be OK.

Daniel that day was facing Mission Impossible; he was in with some hungry lions because he was standing up for his Christian principles, whatever the consequences to him personally, whatever was going to happen to him he was going to follow what God commands. That perhaps for many today is the Mission Impossible. We saw earlier the squirrel with his Mission Impossible, but to live lives that are honourable to God, that bring glory to God, whatever the consequences – that takes courage – that is our Mission Impossible. But God is with us and can help us through.

In Kenya in the 1950s there was an uprising known as the Mau Mau rebellion. It was a terrible time and many atrocities were done. Being a Christian was seen as siding with the British and so if you were caught by the Mau Maus you were certain to die because they were fiercely anti-British. One day a young man, a young Christian went to a local town and had saved up all his money to buy a jacket he had seen. To him the jacket was the bees knee, it was the most wonderful jacket he had ever seen and he had saved so hard for it and this was the day when he was going to buy it.

He went and brought it and when the shopkeeper asked if he wanted it wrapped, he said 'No' because he would wear it then and there, and he was so proud walking home in it. On the way he was joined by an old man from his church, a wonderful man of God who complemented him on the jacket, but it made him a little self-conscious, especially of his pride.

Suddenly they were jumped by Mau Maus. They turned first to the old man who was carrying his bible and so they told him to recant. The man refused and so they said they would kill him. The old man asked if he could pray first and so he stood with his arm held aloft and began to pray in clear tones thanking God of his life and for knowing God and his many blessings. The leader of the Mau Mau group cut off his hand and then his arm and then killed the old man.

So they turned to young man who was shaking with fear and asked him to recant. He very shakily said 'No' and they threatened him with death. So the young man took off his jacket and gave it to the leader saying it was kneed and it was a shame to spoil it and then stood, arm upraised, eyes closed and very stumbingly and nervously began to pray. After a while he began to dry up a little and wondered why he was still alive and so he opened one eye. There on the ground in front of him was his jacket and as he looked round he was on his own.

For him the Mission Impossible was to face death, just like Daniel did for his God. For us the Mission Impossible is to live in our society as Christians, following the Bible and what it says, even in the face of much pressure to do otherwise.