

THE LIONS' DEN

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*“O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually,
able to deliver thee from the lions?”
Daniel 6:20*

THE empire of Babylonia and Chaldea passed into the hands of a new dynasty, and king Belshazzar was slain in a night assault upon his capital. On that very night, he had clothed Daniel in scarlet, and made him the third ruler in the kingdom. This was providential, for had Daniel been in obscurity, he would have been little likely to attract the notice of Darius, but observing him in the palace, clothed in scarlet, Darius would naturally ask who he was, and inquire into his antecedents.

The fame of his wisdom would be quickly told, and the fact of his having twice interpreted the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar in former times, and of his having just then, with startling precision, foretold the downfall of Belshazzar, and the capture of the city by the Medes and Persians, would be eagerly related. Hence it was not at all surprising that Darius took great notice of Daniel, weighed his character, observed his conduct, and after a while, exalted him to be prime minister of his realm.

Daniel's prosperity and honors excited the envy of the courtiers. Full of sullen spite, and brimming over with jealousy, presidents and princes conspired together to cast him down with calumnious accusations. We are wont to say that “any stick will do to beat a dog,” so they looked about for any charge with which they might assail him. I have no doubt they watched him constantly, waited eagerly for his halting, all the while basely flattering the man they wanted to trip up. Can they discover a flaw in his accounts? Can they question the impartiality of his judgment? Can they detect a lack of loyalty in the administration of his government? Can they find fault with his private life?

Nay, but is there nothing against him? Is Daniel such a four-square man that he is more than a match for them? I can well believe that they hunted him here and there till their haughty faces grew haggard in the vain effort to find a cause of complaint, and that they set spies to skulk about his house, and mark his movements, and in fact, they stooped to the meanest stratagems, little heeding how much they compromised themselves if they might but compass his downfall.

But his integrity was proof against all their devices. The more closely they observed him, the more clearly they discerned that he was always diligent, discreet, and devout. So conscientious and so uniformly consistent was Daniel, both in his character and his conduct, that every effort to entangle him in the meshes of their conspiracy proved to be vain.

At length the devil, who does not often run short of devices, puts them up to a fresh plot. O Satan, you are full of all subtlety! “Let us contrive a new law,” say they, “that shall bring his piety and his patriotism into conflict. He is a Hebrew by birth, and he believes, with all his heart, in only one God. Our divinities he despises, towards our temples he shows a silent scorn, he sets no value on the magnificent statues that we venerate, three times in the day he has been accustomed to offer prayer to an invisible protector whom he calls ‘the living God, JEHOVAH,’ surely these peculiarities will supply us with a pretext, and so we shall entrap him.”

So they laid their evil heads together, and devised as cunning a snare as they could possibly invent, and yet, clever as they were, they perished in the trap they had prepared. They managed to involve the king himself in their iniquitous device, and to entangle him in such a way that he must either sacrifice his favorite courtier, or compromise his own truthfulness, and violate the sacred traditions of the empire.

A royal statute was framed, and a decree published, forbidding any petition to be asked of God or man for thirty days. How preposterous!

But when was there ever a despot who was not, sooner or later, deserted of his wits? The passion for power, when indulged without restraint, will lead a man to the utmost foolishness, and urge him to a madness of vanity. In such a false position stood the monarch, who was easily persuaded to issue the infamous edict desired.

In this strait, how will Daniel acquit himself? Will he count it prudent to desert his post, and get out of the way? Nay, Daniel had a soul above such policy. Yet you might imagine that if he must pray, he would go down into the cellar, or offer his supplications to God in some retired place where he need not challenge notice. His petitions will be heard in heaven without respect to the place from which they are presented. Or it might have been expedient to suspend the vocal utterance of prayer, and offer his supplications silently.

Daniel, however was a servant of the living God, and therefore he scorned thus to temporize, and play the coward. Well does one of the old writers call him, *Coeur de Lion*, for he had the heart of a lion. Into that den of lions he went, a lion-like man—not cruel, like the beasts of the forest, but far more courageous.

His conscience towards God was clean, and the course he pursued before his fellow creatures was clear. His sense of truth would not suffer him to be a trimmer. He does not change his habit, but goes upstairs, though he might have known that it was like climbing the gallows, he drops upon his knees, puts his hands together, with his windows open toward Jerusalem in the presence of all his adversaries, and there he prays three times a day as he had done aforetime.

He prays openly, not ostentatiously, in the spirit of a Protestant rather than in the fashion of a Pharisee. He sought no honor, but he shunned no danger. To encounter shame, or to endure reproach, if needful, for the cause of righteousness, had long been his fixed habit, and now that it threatens to bring on him swift death, he swerves not.

Hear those quick feet as they patter along the streets of Shushan. All the presidents and princes are coming together, there is mischief brewing, for they are going to seek an interview with the king. They are anxious to inform his majesty that they have caught Daniel committing the horrible crime of prayer!

Was not this a new offense? Oh, no! The first man that ever died fell a victim to his religion, and so, I suppose, for many and many a century, this was one of the foulest offenses a man could commit against society. Those who serve the living and the true God are sure to challenge the sneers of the time-servers in any age.

There are many, nowadays, who hate nothing as much as a religious man. All the epithets in the catalog of scandal are too good for the man who offers homage to God in everything. An infidel may be reputed honest, intelligent, and worthy of respect, but a genuine Christian is at once denounced as a hypocrite. Away with such a fellow, his conscience is as offensive as his creed! There is toleration for everybody who conforms to the fashion of the day, but no toleration for anyone who believes that the laws of heaven should regulate life on earth.

So they told the king that the laws of his empire must be kept inviolate, good, loyal souls as they were, they would not have a statute broken for the world! There is an end to your monarchy if your royal proclamations are not to be respected! They are so jealous for the common weal, and so earnest for the king's honor, that they must, at all hazards, even if it is at the risk of seeing their dear friend Daniel put into the lions' den, maintain the dignity of the king, and assert the majesty of his imperial edict. The king perceives that he is caught, but thinks the matter over, and finding no alternative, gives Daniel up to the conspirators.

Alas! I see the godly man flung in among the lions, but what do I hear? Do I hear his bones cracking? Can I hear a shriek from the prophet? Is there a noise of the howling of those savage beasts of prey? There is an awful hush while the king puts his seal upon the stone, shall we step down, and peer into the den to see what is going on there? No sooner had Daniel arrived at his destination than an angel

of God encamped in that dungeon. Stretching his broad wings, he seems to have fixed his station in front of those fierce beasts. The safety of Daniel was secured. The mouths of the lions were shut, and they lay down like lambs. Perhaps Daniel found a comfortable pillow for his night's rest upon the shaggy body of one of those monsters that would have devoured him had not the heavenly visitant hushed them into silence by his presence, or perhaps the appearance of the angel was as a flame of fire, and wrought an illusion before the lions' eyes, so that Daniel seemed to them to be surrounded with flame, or robed with fire. At any rate, that night, the prophecy of the latter days, that the lamb shall lie down with the lion, was fulfilled to the letter. God, in His providence and grace, preserved His servant.

We can easily imagine that, like Paul and Silas, when Daniel did not sleep, he made the lions' den vocal with his songs, and that the lions growled the bass while God's angel stood there listening to such music as he had never heard before, till the morning dawned, he then sped his way up to heaven as the king came to fetch Daniel out of his prison house. So Daniel was delivered, and his foes were confounded. There is the story, now what lessons are we to learn from it?

I. First, I want to set before you DANIEL'S EARLY AND ENTIRE CONSECRATION TO THE SERVICE OF GOD.

The king said, "Thy God, whom thou servest continually." This was no empty compliment. His scrupulous uprightness had become so habitual that it was like an instinct of his nature. Daniel began to serve God in his youth. There are no saints to be compared with those whose childish minds were imbued with heavenly truths as soon as their infant lips began to lisp them, just as there are no sinners so inured to wickedness as those who are bred and trained in haunts of vice, tutored from their cradle to utter profane words, and prone to act, as they think bravely, in defiance of every precept of the Decalogue, till they become proficient in every kind of profligacy.

They, who give their morning to God, shall find that, in beginning early, they can keep pace with their work all day. Happy Daniel, thus continually to serve his God from his youth up! Yet it was not the good fortune of his birth that gilded his name with glory. Far from that, it was his sad hap to be carried away captive from his native land while but a stripling. Alienated from the home of his ancestors, he was taken to the palace of Nebuchadnezzar and there, with three other youths, he was entered as a bursar in a heathen school, to be instructed in the strange literature of a strange nation, and so to become one of the king's learned men.

His fealty to the faith of his forefathers was at once put to the proof. Certain food, that was repugnant to his conscience, was served up every day. Probably it had been offered in sacrifice to a false god. Daniel feels that he would be polluted by partaking of it. He, therefore, with his companions, refuses either to eat the king's meat or to drink the king's wine.

As a total abstainer, he drank nothing but water, and as a vegetarian, he ate nothing but simple pulse. With no desire to please his palate, it was his delight to serve his God continually. Another man might have thought it mattered little what he ate and drank, but for Daniel, the jots and tittles of divine revelation had a meaning. He dared not go contrary to the law of his God, even with regard to meats and drinks. Though far from the land that JEHOVAH cared for, he longed to live in the light of God's countenance. Strict obedience to God has a swift reward. His face soon became fairer than the faces of those who fed on the royal diet.

At length, the time arrives when Daniel is to be brought from private tuition into public notice. Nebuchadnezzar has been distressed by a dream, which his astrologers cannot comprehend, and his soothsayers try in vain to search out. To Daniel alone, who served his God continually, the secret is revealed.

Of that vision I do not now attempt to speak, but with what nobility of heart does Daniel stand before the king! He does not tremble before the earthly potentate, nor does he conceal the name of the God in heaven who inspires him with wisdom. He recalls the forgotten dream, and forthwith he is made a great man in the realm, yet still he goes on to serve his God continually. Obscurity could not hinder him,

publicity could not mislead him. Again the king dreams, again Daniel boldly explains, though that explanation is to the effect that the haughty monarch shall be driven as a lunatic from the abodes of men.

For a while, Daniel retires into the shade. You hear nothing of him till Belshazzar ascends the throne, but he is still serving his God, I doubt not, sometimes ministering to his poorer brethren and visiting the sick, but often in his chamber, by prayer, and by study of the Scriptures, seeking and finding communion with the Most High. On a sudden, Belshazzar summons him to his presence. There is a mysterious writing on the wall, which can be read by no eye, and interpreted by no lip, but his. He is not disconcerted, but at the call of royalty, to court he comes.

Oh, with what simple dignity, with what sublime composure, with what heroic courage does the man of God tell the proud monarch, who might cut him in pieces if he willed, of his immediate doom, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting"! If you want to find a counterpart of John Knox in the Bible, I do not know, leaving out Elijah, where you will find a rival to Daniel. How confidently he speaks, "This is the writing"! And again, "This is the interpretation." His word commends itself to the conscience, no man dares to gainsay it.

He is promoted to the highest honor in the realm, now what will he do? There has been a change of monarchs, but there is no change in Daniel. No time-server, he stands to his principles at all times. "Servant of the living God," is still his title. He had taken for his motto, when he began life, "I serve God," and he retains the motto to his life's close. The glory of his God was his one objective throughout all his days, he never swerved.

He is now lifted to a higher post of dignity than he had ever been raised to before. He is prime minister of the greatest monarch of the age, yet he abhors the idolatry of the heathen, and maintains his allegiance to Him who rules in the heavens. They can find no flaw in him, though the eyes of envy watch him from early morn to dewy eve.

O my brethren, it is a hard thing to serve God in high places! Many a man did seem to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior when humbly earning his livelihood by the toil of his hands, and eating his bread in the sweat of his face, but afterwards, when advanced to ease and opulence, he has turned his back upon his friends, and forsook the Lord.

Be very jealous of yourselves if you are rising in the world. Riches are deceitful. It is not easy to walk on a high rope, what lamentable accidents have befallen those who have thus risked their lives! Let us be the more circumspect when we are called to walk in high places. Popularity and fame, riches and honor, are among the sharpest trials of integrity that mortal man can pass through. Daniel could endure them all without his head growing giddy, for he served his God continually.

Now note the effect of what Daniel did. It is comparatively easy to follow the Lord in bright days, but the sun of prosperity suddenly darkens, and the man of God is encompassed with perils. If he continues in his holy course, he will forfeit the king's favor, and lose his life in the most dreadful manner. What will Daniel's determination be?

Oh, the true grit is in him! He is a blade of the true Jerusalem manufacture, and is not to be broken. He will do just as he did before. He opens his window, and in the same posture, down on his knees, he prays, as he did aforetime. Glory be unto the God of Daniel, who made and who kept such a man with his head clear in the crisis, with his heart pure in the midst of persecution, and his feet steadfast to the end!

Ah! dear friends, some of us little know what these pinches mean. There are a few of you who do, you have endured torture without accepting deliverance. I have felt a holy pride in some of you when I have seen how you have borne trial. Witness the man who has a shop which brings him in more profit on a Sunday than it does all the rest of the days of the week, and who says, "It must be one thing or the other, I cannot go to the Tabernacle, and keep my shop open too, which shall it be?" His faith proves stronger than his fear. The shutters are closed on the first day of the week. His business goes, he loses everything, and yet he does not regret it, he parts with ill-gotten gain without a grudge, and goes back to

hard manual labor with a moral satisfaction and a manifest ease of conscience that he never knew before.

Dear souls, your pastor is proud of you. I feel that I can thank God, and take courage, since the Gospel of Christ educates and brings up such simple, honest servants of the living God, and when I have heard of young men serving in a shop, who, when asked to do something positively dishonest, have at first mildly answered that they could not, and when told that they must either comply or retire, have boldly said, "Then we will leave," I have felt how highly honored I am of God to have such men in our ranks.

My eminent predecessor, Dr. Gill, was told by a certain member of his congregation, who ought to have known better, that if he published his book, "The Cause of God and Truth," he would lose some of his best friends, and that his income would fall off, and the Doctor said, "I can afford to be poor, but I cannot afford to injure my conscience." The devil and the deceit of your own heart will readily suggest that you must look after your family, and some good Christian people mistake prudence for piety.

I daresay, had Daniel gone to consult Mr. Prudent Thrifty, and asked his advice, he would have said, "Well, you see, it is a very important thing for us to have you at the head of affairs, I do not think you ought to throw away such an opportunity as you have of doing good. It is not absolutely necessary for you to pray for thirty days! Would it not be better for you to trim a little, and yield a point or two? You do distinguished service to our cause, and by keeping your position, you will be putting your foes to a non-plus. By compromise you will obtain concessions. Worldly wisdom is worth your study."

This is the way that fools are beguiled, and in this way many Christians, alas! drift from their moorings. To plead the present distress is, for the most part, a mere pretence. "Let us do evil that good may come," never was in the code of Old Testament or New Testament truth.

I remember a notable instance, some years ago, of this fallacious reasoning. A reflection was cast on the career of a distinguished clergyman, who resigned his connection with the Established Church, and after much consideration, allied himself with the Baptists. "Did he gain credit," it was asked, "or increase his congregation by the change?" What of that? The answer is easy. Let conscience assert its supremacy, for circumstances do not weigh a feather in the scale.

Long departed from among us, we may still speak of him as the Hon. and Rev. Baptist Noel, and he was right and righteous in his decision, as one who feared the Lord in the face of any loss. If, by stopping where he thought he ought not to stop, or by conforming to what he believed to be a corrupt corporation, he could have saved multitudes of souls, the good done to others would not have extenuated the guilt incurred by himself.

You and I have nothing at all to do with consequences. Be it ours to hearken to the voice of the Lord, and obey His high behests. When God prompts our conscience to a course of action, the slightest demur will recoil with a sense of guilt intolerable. Though the heavens should fall through our doing right, we are not to sin in order to keep them up. At the call of duty, never parley with danger. Should everything seem to go amiss with us after we have done the right thing, there is no cause for regret.

Remember that our conduct is the maker of our character. Ye men of faith, hoist your colors! Leave to your God the providing, stick ye to the obeying. Learn your duty, and do it bravely. "Through floods and flames," if Jesus leads, follow on, never dubious that your welfare is assured.

Here, dear friends, I would remark that the only service to God which is real, genuine, remunerative, is this continual service that sticks at nothing. Any hungry dog will follow you in the streets if you do but entice him with a piece of meat, or a bit of biscuit. How closely he keeps to your heels! But after a while, the bait is gone, and the dog retreats. That is like many a professor. There is some little pleasure in religion, or some advantage, and so he follows Christ, but after a while, there is an attraction elsewhere, and impelled by greed rather than gratitude, he pursues it. Thus do false professors forsake Christ, whom they never did really follow.

But I have seen a man on horseback, splashing the mud about, and I have seen his dog keeping close at the horse's heels—up hill and down dale—whether the roads were smooth or rough, what mattered it

to the faithful hound? His master was before him, so on he went. That is the only kind of dog I would care to own, and I believe this is the only sort of follower that our Lord Jesus Christ is willing to acknowledge.

Oh, those time servers who look one way and pull the other, like the wherry-men upon the stream! As for Lord Fair-speech, Lord Time-server, Mr. Smooth-man, Mr. Anything, Mr. Facing-both-ways, Mr. Two-tongues, and all the members of their club, Mr. By-ends included, the entire company of them will be swept away when the Judge comes with the besom of destruction.

I know you feel the force of this truth. How you loathe a friend who will not stick to you in dark times! Do you remember that companion of yours who used to call in of an evening, and sit and chat with you? What a dear fellow he seemed! You always thought he was a sincere friend, you liked him much, and you confided in his judgment as you often took counsel together. And all went well till, one day, when the dark clouds began to gather over your head. It made a serious change in your circumstances. What was it? A severe loss in business, or perhaps a bankruptcy, now you cannot keep such a well-spread table, or wear as good a hat as you used to do, there is not so much nap on your Sunday coat, you look rather less thriving than in days of yore.

What has become of your friend? Ah! never mind, let him stay where he is, for you have not suffered much loss by getting rid of him. He was never worth knowing before, but you have found out his worthlessness now, and I advise you to have nothing more to do with him. Do you not despise the character of such a man? Do you not feel in your heart, "Well, I can forgive him, but I will have nothing more to do with such a fellow"?

This is but a picture of yourselves if you try to follow Jesus Christ only when you are in the society of his people, and as easily lend yourselves to sing a frivolous or lewd song when you are with the ungodly. What is that man's profession worth who lets his tongue run loose with flippant speech and vain conversation when he gets into the company of such friends as are known to be sons of Belial?

Oh, that we had more Daniels who would serve the Lord continually! The only way to build up a character which will be proof against the temptations of the age, and of your own immediate surroundings, is to commit your cause to God, as Daniel did. Be much in prayer. Prayer keeps the Christian steadfast. You may make a loud profession, but it will not last without prayer. Amidst work and worry, heavy responsibilities and incessant anxiety, you had need often renew the confession of sin and weakness on your bended knees.

Then again, you must have a lively faith in the living and true God, as the prophet had, for only this can sustain you in such a warfare. Is your faith genuine, of the right metal? Spurious faith soon loses its edge. The Christian is in hard straits if he finds that when most he needs courage and comfort, all his strength and joy have departed. Prove your faith in the petty skirmishes of the passing hour, if you would have it endure the perilous conflicts of an evil day.

Have you a religion that did not begin with rigorous self-denial. Then, get rid of it. If you have a religion that suits your constitutional fondness for ceremonies, your aesthetic taste for culture, your habitual passion for music, beware of it. The root of all real religion is simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Away with every counterfeit. That faith which lives on Jesus only, rests on Jesus solely, builds on Jesus wholly, and shows itself in earnest prayer, will give you a consistency and decision of character that will make you like Daniel all your days.

II. Now secondly, who WAS THIS GOD WHOM DANIEL SERVED CONTINUALLY?

Let me ask—*Is Daniel's God worthy of our worship?* I ask the question in all earnestness because I feel positive that multitudes of men have a religion that, in their own judgment, is hardly worth debating about, far less worth dying for. It must have been a sorry spectacle to watch a Papist going to the stake or the scaffold—as many have gone—for the maintenance of a fiction or a falsehood. I should be surprised to see an Agnostic lay down his life for the defense of nothing.

But what shall we say of the living and true God, whom Daniel delighted to honor? Is He worth living for, worth serving, worth dying for? Doubtless, the prophet's devotion grew stronger with the

proof he made of the Lord's goodness and greatness. With childlike faith he clung, at first, to simple precepts that he would not transgress. The revelations he afterwards received seem like rewards for his unfaltering integrity. In his direst emergencies, God manifestly delivered him. He had no other longing for life than communion with the Lord of all the earth.

From the Christian point of view, he was a "man greatly beloved," to the outside heathen, he was "a servant of the living God." But let us repeat the question, that we may have the pleasure of answering it for ourselves. Is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ worthy of our love and our life? Words are wanting to tell the gratitude and joy that we cherish towards God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us even when we were dead in sins!

By faith, I understand that the blessed Son of God redeemed my soul with His own heart's blood, and by sweet experience, I know that He raised me up from the pit of dark despair, and set my feet on the rock. He died for me, this is the root of every satisfaction I have. He put all my transgressions away. He cleansed me with His precious blood, He covered me with His perfect righteousness. He wrapped me up in His own virtues.

He has promised to keep me, while I abide in this world, from its temptations and snares, and when I depart this life, He has already prepared for me a mansion in the heaven of unfading bliss, and a crown of everlasting joy that shall never fade away. To me then, the days or years of my mortal sojourn on this earth are of little moment, nor is the manner of my decease of much consequence. What more can I wish than that while my brief term on earth shall last, I should be the servant of Him who became the Servant of servants for me?

You, dear friends, must be the best judges of your own religion, whether or not it is worth suffering for. If it is not full of immortality, I would not advise you to risk your reputation on retaining it. If it is only a fair profession, you may well blush for it as a foul delusion. The fleeting fashion of the time has its market value, but the sterling truth is a commodity that never fluctuates. Have you found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth? Your religion is genuine if Christ Himself is the all in all of it. Is He your own dear Savior? Then you have pardon and peace, happiness in this present time, and heaven in prospect, happier lot no heart can wish for.

Then there comes another question—*Is Daniel's God able to deliver us from the lions?* My dear friends—you who are suffering just now for the cross of Christ, you who know what it is to be losers for Jesus, to stand out and to endure pains and penalties as Daniel did—you are well aware that the lions are fierce and furious creatures. They are not stuffed animals, having the name without the nature of those beasts of prey.

So, the sufferings of a Christian are not sentimental, they are real. Those lions had not their teeth knocked out, they were not transformed into lambs, they could have devoured Daniel if they had been permitted to do so. It would be foolish to talk of your troubles as trifles, but for the grace of God they might have been enough to drive you back into the world, and to reduce you to despair. Full often, your steps have well-nigh slipped. The lions have sharp teeth, and they would have devoured you, only divine grace has found a means of delivering you out of their mouths.

I ask the man, who has given up a profitable appointment because he would not be false to his convictions, whether, on shorter commons, he has not found the sweeter luxury of contentment? I ask him whether he has not enjoyed, on a harder pillow, more refreshing sleep? I appeal to you, one and all, if a sense of rectitude has not invariably a soothing effect and a gentle stimulus? I know, brethren, that those of you, who have passed through such trials, will bear me witness that there is a sustaining influence vouchsafed to you while you are cast, as it were, into the lions' den.

Some of you are enduring the ordeal now, but others, who have got farther on, have been rescued from dire peril. In most cases that have come under my notice, when anyone has ventured loss for Christ, he has presently reaped some substantial advantage, and his loss has, in the end, proved to be his gain. Many a man has, in this manner, proved God's providence. For an honest scruple, he has been put out of a position that supplied him with a scant livelihood. Contentment, with a bare pittance, was his

only outlook. Loosed from his moorings, he feared lest he should be lost, yet he afterwards traced his enlarged prosperity to that very date. God, who is rich in mercy, has soon found for that man a far better position than he could have held had it not been for his forfeiting the other. And even if your deliverance is not thus speedy and sudden, if, like David, you should say, "My soul is among lions: I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword," yet shall you sing, like David—"My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise."

But should we even dwell among lions till we die, what joy shall it be to leave the lions and be linked with saints and holy angels in the beatific hereafter! The higher reward is bestowed on the higher service, and brighter crowns encircle their brows who have suffered most bitterly and most bravely.

You and I have but few and slender opportunities, in this soft and silken age, of showing our love to our Lord by the surrender of liberty and life for His sake. There are no stocks or racks, no stakes or gibbets, for martyrs now. These are smooth and slippery times, yet if we are so inclined, we can work with a will, with the self-denial and self-sacrifice of missionaries. For the love of Jesus, we can dare to die under a cloud with no hope of being canonized. Faith and patience are martial virtues, which it may be quite within our province to illustrate in humble rather than heroic fashion.

You may wonder why I keep on in this strain. I am aiming at instances which are much more common than some of you may imagine. There are many worshippers, gathered within these walls, whose constant attendance at what is sneeringly called "a conventicle," exposes them to no reproach, and in some instances, would rather win them a measure of esteem. Others, to my knowledge, there are who can never enjoy the privileges of the Lord's people without encountering grievous provocations and bitter malice.

In a congregation of this magnitude, the confidential words spoken to the pastor by the solitary ones would often startle those who sit in their family pews. Confession of Christ frequently causes division in a household. Husband and wife are, for His sake, in hostility. Mother and daughter cannot agree. Taunt and jibe are ill to bear with equanimity. Perhaps it touches men in their trade, and it goes hard with the bread winner when faithfulness takes away his bread and cheese.

My sympathy, however sincere, is of small account, would to God I could inspire you with more fortitude! Let me challenge you to quit yourselves like men. Let me exhort you to play the Daniel. Say now, is your God, the living God, able to deliver you out of the den of lions? I hope you will be able to cheerfully respond, "I believe He can, I believe He will, and if not, though I abide in the den till I die, I will rest quietly there with the angel of His presence as my guardian, for I know He will bring me, when I have suffered a while, to glory everlasting."

"Is thy God, whom you serve continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" Let me put this question in one or two lights, and thus draw our reflections to a close. Leaning over, like that Persian king, I look down into a greater den of lions than he ever descried. It is dark, the stench is foul, and 'midst the dim shadows I discern struggling forms and figures, tormentors, whose faces are hidden, stretching women upon racks, and torturing men with switch and knout, and yonder, a spot where, on hundreds of stakes, martyrs have been burned to the death. In the far distance, a wild horse and a human victim tied to his heels to be dragged to death.

Strange and horrible spectacle that, out yonder!—a long procession of men who were scourged, who were stoned, who were beheaded, who were sawn asunder, saintly men were they, of whom the world was not worthy. Leaning over the mouth of this great lion's den, I ask the persecuted saints of all ages—Has your God been able to deliver you? And with a cheerful shout, loud as the voice of thunder, they cry, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

I look down upon another lions' den. It is still dark, but not so dreary. Night reigns in sacred shade and solitude. The stars are hid, but tapers burn in chambers dimly lit. There, sons and daughters of sorrow are tossed on beds of sickness. Thus they have lain for months, perhaps for years, all hope of health extinguished, all prospect of pleasure passed, their limbs paralyzed, their sight failing, their

hearing dull, calamities of every kind have befallen them. God has permitted the great lions of affliction to come howling round, and to tear away all their comforts and their joys, till they are left without any of that cheerful fellowship with nature which seasons mortal life with sweet relish.

Some of you are robust in health, your head never throbs, your heart never aches, you are hardly conscious that you have any nerves. Small account do you take of the secret, silent, saintly heroism of sufferers, whose pilgrimage on earth is blighted with pain. Oft have I been their companion in tribulation. I appeal to these tried and afflicted children of God. Tell me, ye Daniels, has your God been able to deliver you out of the mouths of the lions? And I hear each one say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" And all in chorus join, saying, "Not one good thing hath failed of all that the Lord our God hath promised, our shoes have been iron and brass, and as our days so has our strength been."

Shall I strain my parable too far if I turn my eye upon another lions' den? It lies in a deep valley. The night hangs heavy. The beasts of prey are diseases that skill and shrewdness, time and talent, have striven in vain to tame. Like lions, strangely dissimilar in outward fashion, but strongly resembling them in instinct, they pounce on their victims and seal their doom. We call this place "the valley of the shadow of death."

I think I am gazing now on the forms of shivering men and women as they are dragged down by the lions. One after another, my familiar friends descend into the grave, and I ask them, in the hour of their departure, "Is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" Calm is their countenance, and clear their voice, as each one chants his solo, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" So, at length, this lions' den loses all its terror.

Then I look into another den, it is almost empty. There is a lion in it—a grim old lion, but I do not see so much as a bone to tell the tale of its victims. No trace of its ravages is left behind. On this soil there once were countless thousands of the slain, it is empty now. Of a sudden, I look upwards, and lo! I see myriads of immortal souls, and they all tell me, "Our God delivered us from the grave, and rifled the tomb of its prey. By a glorious resurrection, He has brought all His ransomed people forth to meet their Lord at the great day of His appearing. There shall they stand before the throne of God, for He has broken the teeth of the lion, and rescued all His children from the power of the adversary."

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.