

**Armagh Baptist Church: Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2018 – 11am**

**Daniel 6:10-28**

**“Daniel in the Den of Lions”**

**Introduction**

This coming Tuesday, a *meaningful* vote will be passed in the House of Commons in London to decide on Theresa May’s plan for withdrawal from the European Union. This is part of a process that was set in motion 3 years ago, when David Cameron, the then Prime Minister, decided to grant a referendum to the people on whether or not the UK should **Remain** a member of the European Union or **Leave**.

I don’t think even he, as leader of the Conservatives, knew that the vote was going to be in favour of **Leaving**. He genuinely thought it would be a vote to **Remain**. But his own party had painted themselves into a corner. For years there had been a Eurosceptic wing within the Conservative Party, while many others were Pro-European. They were tearing themselves apart as a party and the matter of ‘Europe’ had to be settled once and for all. And so, when the referendum was won by the **Leavers**, it plunged this country, and indeed Europe, into a time of great uncertainty and **change**. And if there’s one thing people don’t like, it’s **change!**

Now, it’s very doubtful if the vote on Tuesday will settle matters. It’s very doubtful if Theresa May’s plan will be accepted by Parliament - so what happens next is anybody’s guess. What we do know is that the UK is supposed to be leaving the EU on the 29<sup>th</sup> March next year – which is only 3 months and 3 weeks away!

So we are living through times of great **uncertainty**, that could result in massive **change** for us as a country in the next number of weeks, months and even years.

But in the middle of all that is going on, the question is, who is really in **Control?**

**David Cameron** probably thought he was in control at the time of the referendum.

**Theresa May** thought she was in control until she lost her Parliamentary majority when she called an early General Election last year.

**The Presidents of Europe** probably thought they were in control as they refused to give any more ground in Brexit negotiations over the past 2 years.

**The MPs in Parliament** believe they are taking back control from Europe (and indeed from Theresa May) next Tuesday when they get to vote on her plan.

And right in the middle of it all, the **10 DUP MPs** think they’re the ones in control!

But do you know what? – None of them is in control – ***Our God is in control!***  
And that’s the lesson of Daniel in the Lion’s Den! - I wonder did you know that?

Our God is in control. That’s what we learn in this passage of Scripture. In fact that’s the lesson we’ve been learning over and over again in Daniel. **No matter how things look on the surface - Our God is in control.**

Q. Where does **Power** really lie in this chapter?

You see, a new Empire has come to power – at the start of ch.6.

At the end of ch.5 the Babylonian Empire was no more. Belshazzar, the stand-in king, was killed on the night of his big party. (v.30) He was killed by the armies of the Medes & Persians who over-ran his city. And so by the next verse – Darius, a Mede by birth, was in charge. (v.31) And he set about organising his Empire at the beginning of ch.6.

And all was going well. He set up 3 Presidents, and 120 satraps. He then wanted to promote Daniel, one of those Presidents to be over all the others. But that’s where things began to go wrong.

If Darius had really been in charge, if he had really been in control, if the power really rested in his hands, then there should have been no problem promoting Daniel. But there was.

Daniel’s rivals – all the other civil servants – didn’t take too kindly to the idea of this old man, being put in charge of them (he was now in his 80s!)

They didn’t take it too kindly that ‘*one of the exiles from Judah*’ (v.13) should be promoted over the tops of their heads, who’d been born and bred in Babylon!

They didn’t take too kindly to a Jew, a worshipper of Yahweh, someone from a different religion to theirs, being exalted over them, their gods, idols & images.

So there were all kinds of factors – ageism, racism, political and religious reasons, why these men didn’t like all the changes that were happening in their country.

**So what were they going to do about it? Where did the power really lie?**

Well, they came up with a plan to get Daniel out of the way. They realised they couldn’t find any fault with Daniel’s work, or with his integrity. He was a perfectionist – he did everything far too well for their liking!

They realised the only way they could bring him down was if they could get something on him to do with his religion, to do with his God, that the King would take exception to. So they decided to get the king to pass a new law.

***No more praying to God for the next 30 days!***

Nobody was allowed to pray to any god or man, except praying to the king, for a whole month. And if anybody was found praying to their god, then they would be punished by being thrown into a den of lions.

So with flattery and intrigue, they managed to get the king to sign off on their plan.

So already we're asking the question: **Where does the power actually lie here?**

- Is it King Darius, who signed the papers (v.9).
- Was it the men behind the throne, who got him to sign this law into force (v.8a).
- Or was it *'The Law of the Medes and Persians'* themselves, because over and over again in this passage we're told that *'the Laws of the Medes and Persians cannot be changed!'*

**5 times this phrase occurs:** (v.8a) (v.8b) (v.12) (v.15) (v.17).

Who's in bondage to whom, here?

You'd think the Emperor would hold absolute power.

But now, the men behind the throne, the civil servants, have over-powered him.

And then we find they're **all** held in bondage to *'The Laws of the Medes and Persians'* because they seem to be unable to change their laws - even a bad one!

At times, in all this Brexit process, you'd think that nobody was in absolute control. David Cameron seems to have been over-powered by something or someone to call the referendum in the first place. Then he resigned and left us to it! Was Nigel Farage the powerful individual (for a time) that managed to make that happen?

Was Theresa May really in power through all the negotiating process?

She seemed to be very weak at times, as she went to negotiate with the heads of Europe, and yet to her credit she has stuck at it with dogged determination!

Is it that Europe holds all the power and sway over us as a member nation, perhaps more power than we ever thought they had?

Are we in bondage to rules and regulations, and laws and statutes passed by European Courts and Parliaments over the last 40 years, that we can't now break free from, or have the right to determine our own destiny anymore as a nation?

Where does the power really lie? Who is in control of all that is going on?

Well, let's take a closer look at this passage and find out who or what was really in control in the story of Daniel in the Lion's Den.

First of all, I want you to notice...

## 1. The Accusation against Daniel (vs.10-15)

As we saw last week, when the law was passed about no praying to God for 30 days, Daniel didn't flinch – he just kept on doing what he'd always done – he continued to pray to his God 3 times every day, on his knees, in his room that pointed towards Jerusalem, with his windows open. He wasn't hiding it, he wasn't flying in the face of this new law, he was just doing what he'd always done – he talked to God in prayer.

And all the other civil servants were out to investigate, because they knew that's exactly what he'd be doing. No surprise there!

So, then they went to the king (v.12) and slyly they asked him:

*'O king, did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?'*

To which the king said (v.12):

*'The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.'*

So without knowing what they're up to, he has himself trapped, so they proceed:

*'Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.'*

Now, not wanting any harm to come to Daniel (who the king greatly admires) we're told in v.14 that the king was distressed and he set his mind to deliver Daniel. In fact, he does all in his power to rescue him, until the sun went down (v.14).

But the civil servants return before the end of the day, just to remind him (v.15):

*'Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.'*

So not only have these men trapped the king, they are now binding his hands to do anything to help Daniel, by reminding him that the laws of the Medes and Persians can't be changed, even by the king who had enacted those laws! So the king's hands are tied. He's not as powerful as he thought he was!

There was nothing else he could do, so he gave the command to bring Daniel, and to cast him into the den of lions (v.16).

And in v.17 a stone was brought and laid at the mouth of the den of lions, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and the signet ring of his lords, so that nothing could be done to change the situation that Daniel now found himself in! And the king went to his palace a very unhappy, anxious man that night (v.18).

So who's really in control here? It's not the king. It's not the Prime Minister, Daniel. Is it the Law of the Medes & Persians because they can't be changed, or is it the civil servants that are running the show? They seem to have got the upper hand!

Or is there someone else in control that we haven't thought about yet? We've seen the Accusation against Daniel, now we want to see...

## 2. The Vindication of Daniel (vs.16-24, 28)

Remember (v.14) the king had done all in his power to deliver Daniel from his fate. He had laboured until the sun went down to try to rescue him. The last thing he wanted was for any harm to come to Daniel that night. He even spent the night in his palace, fasting, without any entertainment, and he hadn't been able to sleep all night.

The most powerful man in the world wasn't able to do a thing for Daniel! But notice what he said, just before Daniel was thrown into the Lion's Den (v.16)

*The king declared to Daniel,*  
**"May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!"**

That almost sounds like a prayer, doesn't it? And it's coming from the lips of a pagan Emperor – *'May the God that you serve continually, deliver you!'*

And those were the last words spoken to Daniel before he was dropped into the eerie silence of the Den of Lions.

The sealing of the signet rings, meant, as far as the king was concerned, there was nothing humanly speaking that anybody could do to rescue Daniel. His fate had been sealed – literally! Or had it?

Look at v.19:

*'Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel,*  
**"O Daniel, servant of the Living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"**

He's almost coming in faith, believing that what he prayed for the night before was going to be answered the next morning! Do you pray with that amount of faith!?

Do you see the similarity between what he said the previous night, and what he asks the next morning? This man hasn't been sleeping; but has he been praying!?

And then out of the silence of the den of lions comes this voice (vs.21-22)

***"O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm."***

In other words, Daniel was 100% vindicated. He had never done anything against the king, and he had never done anything against his God – he was blameless! God had 'sent his angel' - Just as he had sent his angel into the fiery furnace to stand by Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego many years ago in Nebuchadnezzar's day, now he had sent his angel to protect Daniel in Darius' day!

Do you remember how the soldiers had checked out Daniel's 3 friends when they came out of the fiery furnace? Well, the same thing happens here (v.23)

*'Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, (why?) because he had trusted in his God.'*

So who was really in control? Who was really in charge that night? Where did absolute power actually lie? It lay with the Living and True God, not any man!

And that's what we need to remember today: Men may come and go. Men may scheme and plot. But at the end of the day, God will have the final say!

Not only did he have the final word on Daniel: vindicating him, he also had the final word on Daniel's enemies: judging them – the very scheme that they had come up with for Daniel, was how they and their families met their deaths.

*'Before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.'* (v.24)

It was just the same as with Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego. The soldiers that tried to throw them into the fire, died from the heat of the fire, even though the three young friends came out of it alive! God will vindicate his servants. He will right all wrongs, if only we will wait for Him to have the final say. **He is in control!**

And that brings us finally to...

## 3. The Proclamation of Darius (vs.25-27)

Do you remember at the end of ch.4 Nebuchadnezzar wrote a letter to all the people of his Empire? He told them his testimony; how God had changed him.

Well, now Darius the Mede, does something similar.  
Now it's going to an even wider population – not just Babylon & Assyria, but now the Medes and Persians as well – news of the Living God is spreading far & wide!

*'Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and languages  
that dwell in all the earth:  
"Peace be multiplied to you.  
I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion,  
People are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, (why?)*

***For He is the Living God, enduring forever;  
His kingdom shall never be destroyed,  
And his dominion shall be to the end.  
He delivers and rescues;  
He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth,  
He who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions".'***

He's proclaiming the Gospel, the Good News of Christ's Kingdom – the only kingdom that will last forever – he's proclaiming it far and wide across the world. The most powerful man in all the world is recommending faith in the Living God! He's encouraging people to put their trust in the God of Daniel.

**Why? Because Our God is the One who is really in control!**

Not Darius, not the civil servants, not Daniel, not the Laws of a Nation, but God! He is the One who is in control. Will you remember that this week? With Brexit!?

### **Conclusion**

But before we finish, we cannot leave this passage without noticing something: Did you notice the similarities between the story of Daniel & the Lions' Den, and the story of Jesus and his death and resurrection, over 500 years later?

Daniel was falsely accused	So was Jesus.
The King did all in his power to rescue Daniel	So did Roman Governor Pilate.

**But in the end both men were painted into a corner,  
and had to order the execution of an innocent man.**

Daniel was thrown into a Den	Jesus' body was placed in a tomb
The king sealed it with his signet ring.	Pilate sealed the tomb of Jesus.
Next morning the king ran to the Den.	Next morning women ran to tomb
Daniel was found to be still alive!	Jesus had come back to life.
Daniel could have died!	Jesus did die!
Daniel was raised out of his Den.	Jesus was raised out of his tomb!
Daniel was vindicated by God.	Jesus was vindicated by God.

The Good News was heralded to the world      The Gospel is preached to world.

From the earliest days of Christianity, believers have seen the link between these stories – Daniel points us to Jesus.

**BUT – there's one more thing I need to say before we close:**

Not everyone who obeys God, rather than men, will be spared a cruel death. But everyone who trusts in Christ, can say, *'Though they slay me, yet will I trust Him!'*

We might be **spared from** death, or we might **pass through** death.

Either way, we will be raised to eternal life in Christ's kingdom forevermore.

**Why? – How do we know?**

**Because our God is the Only One who is in absolute control  
of all that happens in His World!**

**Trust Him, in these days of great uncertainty,  
He's the Only One who knows the future!**