

Be Not Afraid; In God You Will Stay!

A sermon based on Daniel 6:10-12,16-23

This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

I can still remember it like it was yesterday. It ranks up there in my memories, just below my wedding day, the day Mara was born. Sitting there, at the “hallowed” grounds on Lambeau Field in Green Bay, on January 2, 2011, one of the coldest days I could remember (I know, I hadn’t experienced Alaska yet!), watching my beloved Packers battling the Chicago Bears in the last game of the regular season for the final playoff spot.

The score was tied...neither team seemed to be gaining the upper hand. The Bears were threatening. And then the chant arose. Go Pack, Go! Go Pack, Go! Soon, the entire stadium was shaking to the tune of the cry from tens of thousands of fans. I’d like to think that helped propel the Packers not just to win the game, but to win the Super Bowl that year as well!

Rallying cries are fairly common in sports. “SKOL” is another popular one, for the Minnesota Vikings (to show I can be somewhat impartial!). But they also have their place throughout history, too, for the real battles in the trenches. Can you think of some famous ones? How about this one, “Remember the Alamo!” Do you know what the rallying cry was during the Revolutionary War? “Liberty or death.”

How about today? I think we’ve seen some in a different battle coming to a close here in the next couple of weeks. “Stronger together!” “Make America great again!” Whatever the third party’s is (I think it’s “Anyone but one of those two”! It’s actually “Our Best America Yet Live Free #TeamGov Be Libertarian with me You In?”).

What’s the point? What purpose do they serve? Often, it’s to unite people together to support an idea, a cause, a team. It’s to give encouragement when circumstances aren’t looking that great.

Friends, Christianity is under attack. I know it. You know it. There is a very serious struggle going on between the faithful and the forces of Satan. And it’s not the Super Bowl at stake, but something much, much greater...our eternity. We need encouragement. We could use a rallying cry.

Well, 499 years after the sound of nails being driven through 95 theses into the church door at Wittenberg echoed through the city streets, 495 years after the “lions” growled and snapped at Luther as he stood before rulers, the religious elite at the Diet of Worms and boldly took his stand, saying, **“Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise,”** today, on this Reformation Day, we sound our battle cry. And here it is, “Be not afraid; in God you will stay.” Again, be not afraid; in God you will stay.

Christianity is under attack. I imagine that’s what the tabloids would’ve read in Daniel’s day...or at the very least, that’s the recurring theme we see throughout the book of Daniel...throughout all of Israel’s time in captivity in Babylon.

Now, a lot of those attacks were passive...the Israelites, in a foreign land, surrounded by heathen religion. I’m sure bits of the Babylonian religion and its teachings were threatening to creep into Israel’s beliefs. Maybe the Israelites felt that pressure on the inside to conform, to try to fit in.

But today, here, we see a direct attack on their religion, in particular, a direct attack against Daniel. You see, he had grown too powerful...an Israelite captive on the verge of becoming the second most powerful man in Babylon. And oh, how that infuriated the locals, the other administrators and satraps, who were jealous.

And so, their attack? Right before our verses today, ***“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.”***

In other words, let’s force Daniel to stop praying to his God (which we know he won’t), and then, if we catch him still doing that (which we know we will), we can get rid of him by tossing him to the lions (which will make any of those other Israelites think twice about messing with us). Oh, and by the way, we can cause them to sin by making them pray to a different god, King Darius, right? Pretty much the only option was sin or die.

Christianity is under attack. In 1517 and in 1521, that was Martin Luther’s reality. Facing immense pressure from the lions of his day, the Holy Roman Emperor, Pope Leo (literally Latin for lion), others within the Roman Catholic church...facing pressure to recant, to disavow what he had learned and correctly understood to be the truth of God’s Word...what he was striving to share and re-teach to those who were being led astray. The scare tactics his enemies used...recant or be excommunicated...recant or be labeled a heretic...recant or find a bounty on your head...a bounty for your head. Again...pretty much the only option was sin or die.

Christianity is under attack. Today, Satan sees the faithful holding steadfast, staying true to God. And as you can guess, he does not like that. Have you seen his attacks?

Like with the Israelites in captivity, a lot of those attacks on us today can be passive. Just think for a moment. What are the religions of the world, of society, trying to squeeze their way into your life? Schools teaching the theory of evolution as fact, but not allowing prayers to be prayed or religious symbols or clothing to be worn...trying to choke God out of our lives. Government regulations, following the whims of society, making immorality not so immoral anymore, in regards to issues like abortion and homosexuality, trying to draw us into agreement. Attempts by other religions to blur the lines or downplay the differences between us and them, as if it’s no big deal, like these “COEXIST” bumper stickers, or recent news of an English bishop of the Lutheran World Federation, who’s planning on meeting with Pope Francis in the next week or so to further talks on unity and fellowship between the Lutheran Church (not ours) and the Roman Catholic because, as the article states, **“the Reformation was all a big misunderstanding.”**

How about even just post-modernism, how by and large, people believe morality is subjective...There’s no absolute right or wrong; I will choose what’s right and wrong for me; don’t you tell me (and don’t you dare use God’s Word to tell me) I’m wrong.

Friends, that’s scary. That’s the age we live in right now. But you know the big difference? As opposed to Daniel’s world and Luther’s world, the option for you isn’t only either sin (and give in to those attacks) or die. We live in a society that grants religious freedom. We don’t live in fear of being thrown to lions.

So, no fear of death...it’s easier for us to fend those attacks off, right? You know, in the face of death, Daniel held to what he knew to be true, continuing to pray to God. Martin Luther was also put to the test. In the face of opposition from earthly authorities, he too held to what he knew to be true. They recognized their obedience was to a higher authority. So is ours.

Do we always live that way though? We constantly face a permissiveness in our society that allows God's Word to be challenged and altered. Are we willing to stand up for the truth of God's Word? Or are even the perceived attacks too much for us....where we're not actually being attacked but we assume what will happen if we fight for God. "If I tell people God says this contrary to what they're doing, I'll stick out and be the object of ridicule." "If I stand up for Jesus and live the way he wants me to, I risk losing so much, my job, my friends, my reputation. I can't risk that."

And the courage we see in Daniel's actions, to put God before king and faithful obedience above his own life...the courage we know Luther had, to stand before princes and rulers and put his life on the line to protect the truth and integrity of God's Word and will, that courage sometimes lacks in our lives. The lions of this life, the attacks on Christianity...on you and me come...and we cower in fear....even worse, sometimes we succumb and sin.

And the rallying cry arises. Believers, be not afraid; in God you will stay. Luther once said that in Daniel, "**we see the conflict and victory of faith.**" That's not the only place we witness that victory, though. You see, for Daniel, God shut the lions' mouths to answer the king's question: Is your God able to rescue you? Yes, he is.

From the lions of this life, from the attacks of Satan and the world in your life, from the eternity of hell you and I deserve for our sins, is your God able to rescue you? Yes he is. Be not afraid, in God you will stay.

How can we be sure? Well, Psalm 91 reminds us, "**If you make the Most High your dwelling- even the LORD, who is my refuge – then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.**" King Darius' hands were tied by his decree, but God's hands were not. Darius was powerless to reverse a royal decree; God was able to nullify it.

"**The wages of sin is death**" is God's decree for you and me. He didn't nullify it, though. He didn't even send his angels to guard us from that punishment. Instead, he fulfilled his decree in Jesus....Jesus, who faithfully stood up and obeyed God's will perfectly his entire life in the face of constant danger and death...and then he set that perfection aside and became our sin substitute on the cross so he could give his righteousness and forgiveness to us...and then he rose to show those lions of this life have not won and have absolutely no power over us.

Be not afraid; in that God you will stay. Do you remember why Daniel survived? He said, "**[The lions] have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in [God's] sight.**" By praying to God, he hadn't done anything wrong. We have. Yet, our enemies cannot hurt us...hell cannot touch us because God finds us innocent...because of the robes of Jesus' righteousness we wear now and always. Friends, Lamentations reminds us, "**Because of the LORD'S great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning.**"

So, again, be not afraid; in God you will stay. You know, that word stay, it's interesting. It often means 'to remain,' which makes sense here. God is our fortress, our refuge, to whom we can always go and find safety and security from attacks...they can't pull us away.

But "stay" can also mean to support, prop, hold up. And we know that's what God does for us. He tells us in his Word, "**If you think you are standing firm (on your own), be careful that you don't fall...God is faithful...when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.**" He tells us in his Word, "**Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.**"

On Christ, our solid rock...on Christ, who lived, died, and rose for us, we stand...and we stay....and you can stand for Jesus and his Word because God is your support...God is your stay. And here's what that means for you.

God is your stay; he keeps the enemies at bay. Martin Luther wrote, ***"This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will, he can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done!"*** I always think of the Looney Tunes cartoon, with Foghorn Leghorn, the rooster, who would always annoy and bother the dog, George P. Dog, who would, of course, give chase...and it seemed he would get Foghorn, until he reached the end of his chain and his neck was snapped back. With God, those lions of this life cannot harm you.

God is your stay...in him, to him you can pray. Daniel was faced with a tough choice; his immediate reaction was to go home and pray. Our enemies are fierce; God's love is fiercer. When face to face with those enemies, we can pray to God and know he hears and answers.

God is your stay...him will we obey. You see, in the face of danger, Daniel "continually" served God. The attacks we face today are tough...they are dangerous...they are relentless. With God propping us up, we can and we will continue to faithfully serve him.

God is your stay...we will not be afraid. This Reformation Day...our entire lives, that's our rallying cry. I'll admit, my rallying cry is alright. Martin Luther has a better one. We just sang it, A Mighty Fortress Is Our God. It's been called the Battle Hymn of the Reformation...because with this hymn, Luther joined a battle against any endeavor to obstruct the gospel...its integrity, its truthfulness, its spread.

Now, there were moments in his life when even Luther felt something similar to despair. In such hours he would say to Melancthon, his faithful coworker, "Come, Philip, let us sing the 46th Psalm (which we sang earlier)." And the two friends would sing loudly in Luther's own version – "Ein' feste Burg is unser Gott." Since then, uncounted wavering, doubting, fearful hearts have been strengthened by this hymn of faith, have been filled with new courage and power to battle for the right to remain true to faith in Jesus. We have been, too.

So we join in the rallying cry, which as one man described, ***"There is something in it like the sound of Alpine avalanches or the first murmur of earthquakes, in the very vastness of which dissonance a higher unison is revealed to us...It is evident that to this man (Luther) all popes, cardinals, emperors, devils, all hosts and nations, were but weak, weak as the forest with all its strong trees might be to the smallest spark of electric fire."***

Be not afraid; God is our stay. Our trust in Jesus doesn't guarantee an absence of persecution, but faithfulness in spite of it. That gives us courage. The lions will come, but in God we will stay, until Jesus' promise reaches its final fulfillment, ***"All people will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."*** Until then, we won't be afraid; in God, our Mighty Fortress, we will stay. Amen.