

October 29, 2023 (Reformation A)

**Daniel 6:13-16**

***“Heroes know how to face the LIONS!”***

We all love heroes. There have been countless books, stories, movies and TV shows about heroes. We also love **real life heroes** – those who run *into* the burning buildings to save people / those who run *toward* the gunshots in order to save lives. What our society does **not** clearly understand, however, is what TURNS ordinary people into real life heroes, capable of extraordinary heroic acts of valor. Scripture alone – God’s WORD, *does* have the answers we seek, the truths we need, and abundant examples for us of what makes genuine heroes, and what heroic acts of valor look like in the lives of God’s people.

One such example, which is before us today, is that of **Daniel** the prophet. He lived 5 ½ centuries before Jesus came, and was carried off to Babylon with the exiles from Jerusalem when the city and nation was destroyed – as so many of the other prophets had predicted when the people of Israel had turned their backs on the LORD and embraced false gods. Now he (and the other exiles) were transplanted to a society that was *very* hostile to the One True God. It was an extremely dark chapter. Times were tough – and, that’s when heroes tend to shine the most brightly. Daniel was a real-life hero – and we can learn so much from the Scripture verses before us today. I want to highlight 3 simple key truths that turn people into real life heroes.

Let’s begin with **Daniel 6:13** (NIV 11) **Then they said to the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.”**

Key TRUTH #1 about Daniel: He knew God – the One True God of the Bible / the Triune God of perfect holy standards, who is also full of grace and truth, and who bestows upon us sinners eternal salvation that is by faith alone. Since Daniel knew the true God and LORD – he had something real / true / powerful – that was so valuable it was worth dying for.

There is a lot of talk today about what draws people into “extremist ideologies”. To even know what those are one must know the Truth about the One True God. I think there is one key element that people so often overlook: human beings are searching for something REAL / a meaning and purpose in life that is worth dying for. Unfortunately – so many are fooled, and are lured into a false ideology, and the worship and service of false gods who don’t even exist – Satan is behind it, and the results are demonic and tragic.

Daniel, on the other hand, found what we ALL yearn for in our heart of hearts: **truth** / GOD – who is higher and more powerful than all our enemies / FAITH – something that is even worth dying for / something that even takes away the fear of death / the certainty of eternal salvation . . . and he would not sacrifice that! He continued to pray and carry on his worship life, despite the wicked plots of evil and powerful men who were so clearly jealous of him.

Key TRUTH #2) He knew how to face the lions. He faced them in the power of his faith. He refused to hide his faith or react out of fear. It was going to cause him trouble, and he would give his enemies the ammunition they needed to get rid of him (or so they thought). Soon enough he would find himself face-to-face with hungry and angry lions. The king himself was not above the law back then – and had to follow through on this wicked decree: **(verses 14-16a)**

**14 When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him. 15 Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, “Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.” 16 So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. . .**

Daniel knew key TRUTH #3) that in God’s grace and power, he would overcome – even if his physical body was torn to pieces . . . Daniel would triumph no matter what. The only way to face insurmountable odds is in the LORD – who is bigger than any enemy we could ever face. The king himself was watching – along with everybody else – to see if Daniel’s God had the power to save him: **verse 16b: The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!”**

The LORD, in His wisdom, decided that Daniel’s deliverance (not his death) would better serve His purposes . . . and we know the miraculous outcome here. Daniel knew that God would save him – *live or die* – and was prepared to leave this world, or to stay in it for a while longer. Key TRUTH #3 is the attitude genuine heroes have as they face their own mortality, and why they can have confidence and peace – even when staring death in the face.

We could talk all day about genuine heroes who are found in God’s Word – but let’s turn our attention to the Greatest Hero of all – **Christ Jesus** / God made flesh / the Savior of the world. We can even see the same 3 key truths in His life and ministry too – although the circumstances and details were quite different. TRUTH #1) He knew the One True God – *obviously!* He **was** God! His mission was totally unique – it was our souls that He considered worth dying for, so He came as promised / He suffered

and lay down His life as a sacrifice of atonement (as promised). TRUTH #2) Jesus faced the **lions** too – in the strength and power of God. It was the insurmountable and dreadful weight of all human sin. It was the hatred and venom of the spiritually dead and hardened religious leaders of His own beloved people. He faced HELL itself – in the strength and power that only God could provide. Key TRUTH #3) He knew He would be victorious – and God delivered Him right through death, back to life, and to glorious resurrection victory.

Now we turn our attention to the **Apostles** – their circumstances were quite different too, but you still see those same 3 key truths about their heroic lives: TRUTH #1) They knew God – they knew Jesus **as** God, they knew the fact of His resurrection, and that the power of His Gospel forgiveness . . . was worth dying for. TRUTH #2) They too faced the lions – bold and powerful enemies that must have seemed insurmountable. They faced them in the power that God the Holy Spirit had provided them with. TRUTH #3) They knew that, in Christ, they would always be victorious! Some of them were rescued from prison and death at times, but eventually they were all killed off – then were taken to glory as victorious heroes . . . as the Faith spread.

Today we celebrate the Lutheran Reformation and we see similar heroism in **Martin Luther** and the reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. TRUTH #1) Luther found God in Holy Scripture – he tasted of the liberating Gospel to be found in Word and Sacrament, and that gracious gift of salvation by faith alone . . . was worth fighting for / was worth dying for. TRUTH #2) So – he stood up and faced the lions, who by this time had seized control of Christianity and sought to destroy the Truth of the Gospel. He faced them in the power that God provided by His Spirit. TRUTH #3) Live or die – he knew he was victorious in Christ. Humanly speaking he never should have survived standing up to the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor – but, like Daniel, God still had plans for him – and used him to bring the pure Gospel back out into the world, before God took him home through death.

Now we can bring it home to **us** – we all have different circumstances, different lives, and we face different “lions”. But – you can see how those same 3 KEY truths from these verses produce heroes right here among us too! TRUTH #1) You know God. You have the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ and the powerful theology of God’s Holy Word. You have something valuable enough to die for . . . right there in your hands! TRUTH #2) We face our own “lions” – they might seem impossible to overcome at times, but you know that God is bigger than any challenge and stronger than any enemy we could ever face. We face them in the Power of God’s Holy Spirit – that comes to us in Word and Sacrament. TRUTH #3) Live or die – you know that, in Christ, you are

victorious! You will live beyond the grave, and stand in glory, with heroes from throughout time, next to your glorious Savior. Those truths / those **facts** – empower and enable you to be heroes in your own lives.

I think it’s easier for us to look back in time – to Luther, the Apostles, Christ, Daniel and the Prophets – and see *them* as heroic champions . . . while it may be a bit of a stretch and quite tough to see ourselves that way. The “lions” we face might seem pretty tame and pretty small in comparison. We can see how it all played out with them – we, on the other hand, are right in the thick of it now. The personal “lions” we have to face might, at times, *seem* so scary, and so insurmountable, and the victory *seems* so far off. Our faith is so often weak – and sometimes we doubt God, we get confused by the lies of our spiritually hostile world, we might not be all that certain about our own faith, so we hide it, and we’re afraid to LIVE it, afraid to sacrifice for and serve the Kingdom of God or to share it – because . . . in the moment . . . it just doesn’t seem to be worth it. So, we can easily blend in with our unbelieving culture and take the easiest and most comfortable path forward – pursuing a **non**-heroic life and existence.

The **solution** is NOT to compare ourselves to Daniel or Luther – and wallow in self pity! The solution is to focus on the KEY TRUTHS that turned them into heroes! #1) Look at GOD – you have the **truth** about Him. You are forgiven! You are righteous and holy by faith alone! Nothing is more valuable than that! You are baptized! You have eternal salvation! #2) Now look at the “lions” you face – is anything too big or too ferocious that God can’t deliver you from it? You CAN face the lions: in the strength and power of God Himself – the strength and power He provides to you! #3) Victory is already yours! Jesus will point to your heroic deeds of faith one day – even if it’s a simple act of kindness that you don’t even remember. And . . . you’re still here – that means you have time for MORE heroic deeds of faith that will make a huge difference in this world!

I thought about these key truths this past week when visiting my mother. Every night she invited people over – cousins / relatives / neighbors / friends. Very often they did NOT have the same views on God / religion / politics / the Middle East / etc. that I have. I, at times, when those topics came up, felt like I was being thrown before the lions. I just prayed that God would help me confidently (and gently) speak the truth in love – and bless the results of our time and conversations. Take the pure **truths** of God’s Word to heart – and – like countless heroes before, just see what great things God can do in you and through you – genuine heroic things that He delights in (big and small) . . . *before* God takes you to join Him in the victorious rest of eternal glory.