

and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

Then Daniel said unto the king, O king, live for ever.

My God hath sent his angel, and hath closed the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me, forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he had believed in his God.

Our talk today presents one of the Bible stories with which the young are most familiar.

The child early learns the difference between the domestic and the ferocious animals. The puppy and the kitten are its first pets, while the lion and the tiger are the first to arouse its sense of fear. It is easy to understand, therefore, how Daniel's thrilling experience in the lion's den grips the child's imagination and arouses its interest.

The lesson of moral courage drawn from it has played an important part in the lives of all who have ever attended Sunday School or studied the Bible under the instruction of parent or pastor. "Dare to be a Daniel" has echoed in millions of little hearts and has called innumerable hosts to courageous resistance in hours of trial.

And its lesson is for adults as well as for youth. There is no day in life between the cradle and the grave when one may not be called to meet a trial in which his faith can be strengthened by a recollection of Daniel's fidelity to God and by God's reward of that fidelity.

A TRIBUTE TO DANIEL'S WORTH

The story as related in the sixth chapter of Daniel exhibits unregenerate human nature and kingly weakness as well as a sublime faith.

Darius, conqueror of Babylon, had conferred high authority upon Daniel. We read that immediately after the slaying of Belshazzar on the night of his infamous feast and the ascension of Darius to the throne, "it pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes * * * and over these three presidents, of whom Daniel was first." To emphasize still more the respect shown for Daniel, it is stated that he "was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him."

Such is the tribute paid to Daniel's worth. It is not surprising that such preference, shown to one of foreign blood, especially to one who was brought into the country as a captive, should arouse the envy of his associates. The presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel. Those who deny the fall of man and contend that human history proves continuous progress upward is the natural course, will have difficulty in explaining the tendency of man to sin.

The Bible gives abundant evidence of the fatal malady of sin from the first page to the last, and the record since those days has been in line with Bible history—sin always and sin everywhere. The spiritual nature is in constant combat with the downward tendency. Just as the spark of life continually battles against the forces that would drag the body back to the dust from which it came, so the spiritual in man is battling every moment against the gravitation that, in the moral world, pulls man sinward.

PLOTTING DANIEL'S RUIN

These enemies of a godly man plotted his ruin. The mental machine called the mind, which some are wont to worship as if it were a god, is but a tool in the control of man's will. It plots a murder as willingly as it plans a noble service. The wicked hearts of Daniel's wicked associates were in control of their brains and they succeeded in devising a scheme for Daniel's hurt.

They could not find aught against his conduct in office, "forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him." They confessed this; then they said: "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel except we find it against him concerning the law of his God."

What a wonderful tribute to an upright man! What greater praise could evil men give to a servant of God?

So they set out to snare him through his very loyalty to Jehovah. And here we see how they employed the vanity of a king to aid their conspiracy.

They conceived the idea of flattering Darius by proposing a decree according to which no one would be permitted to "ask a petition of any God or man for 30 days, save of thee, O king." And they presented the suggestions as coming from "all the presulents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors and the

captains"—thus including Daniel himself. A lie of course, but it had the effect that they intended. The king was weak enough to sign the decree; thus the trap was set and then it was sprung.

WHY THERE ARE SO FEW DANIELS

They knew that Daniel prayed three times a day and they knew that he prayed with his windows open toward Jerusalem where his devotions could be observed by passersby. They were not long in securing the needed proof, for Daniel did not falter for a moment. He prayed as usual and he prayed with full knowledge of the decree and knowing that it was to be used against him.

Why, it has often been asked, did Daniel expose himself to danger unnecessarily? Why did he invite punishment when it was so easy to pray in some other part of the room? Why, when he knew that the decree was signed, did he insist on kneeling in front of the window where his disobedience would be observed by any passerby?

Many a Christian has asked similar questions on similar occasions and made an answer quite different from the answer made by Daniel—and, therefore, history does not give us as many Daniels as there should have been.

The effect of Daniel's fidelity can be estimated better today than it could have been when Daniel was praying. His decision, which at that time seemed of little importance to any one save Daniel, stands out today as epoch making, showing how impossible it is for a human being to calculate the infinite consequences of a single act. The Christian cannot turn out his light for a moment; he must always be on his guard lest an opportunity for service pass unimproved.

"FOR HE IS THE LIVING GOD"

Let us see what followed. Daniel's disobedience was at once made known to the king, and then the king was weighed in the balance and found wanting. Instead of refusing to be a party to a foul crime, he allowed the conspirators to hold him to a decree obtained by deliberate deception, and Daniel was cast into the lions' den.

Then what? The king spent a sleepless night, while Daniel was at ease among the beasts whose ferocity was restrained by their Maker. The monarch hastened to the den at dawn and "cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel." Even during the night watches he had hoped that Daniel's God would save him from the hunger of the beasts (and from the king's weakness), and he was overjoyed when the prophet answered:

"O king, live forever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me."

And then what? The king had the accusers of Daniel cast into the den; retribution followed, as retribution always follows.

And then? King Darius wrote unto all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth and made a decree that in every dominion of his kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, "for He is the living God."

And then? The release of the children of Israel and their return from exile.

AN ACT THAT HAS SHAPED THE CENTURIES

As it is impossible to foresee the good that may follow from a single act of obedience to God, so it is impossible to calculate all the evils that may follow in the train of a single sin. We know what Daniel's faith has meant to millions, but we cannot estimate the calamities for which he would have been responsible if, in this moment of trial, he had surrendered to the promptings of worldly prudence.

One recalls in this connection the words of Wendell Phillips, "How prudently most men sink into nameless graves, while now and then a few forget themselves into immortality." Daniel forgot himself into immortality, just as many have done who have followed in his steps and obeyed without thought of consequences to themselves.

It is by attempting the impossible that we learn what faith can accomplish; those who lack faith cannot know because they do not try. A colored preacher once expressed his idea of faith as "willingness to do what God tells us to do without asking any questions." To illustrate, he said, "If God tells me to butt my head through a stone wall, I butt—that is my part; going through the wall is God's part."

Daniel obeyed; he attempted what seemed impossible and, by his faith, set in motion a train of circumstances which still profoundly impresses the life of the centuries.

THE KING WHO FULFILLED A FAMOUS PROPHECY

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR JULY 30

(Jeremiah xxix:10; Ezra 1:1-8, 11)

For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,

Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.

And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered.

Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth from Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;

Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

The fulfilment of a famous prophecy, the generous act of a great king in obedience to a summons from the Almighty, and the return of the Children of Israel to their home land after an exile of 70 years in Babylon, whither they had been carried captives of war by Nebuchadnezzar—these give us the theme of today's Bible Talk.

What was this famous prophecy? "For thus saith the Lord," wrote the prophet Jeremiah from the ruins of Jerusalem to them that had been carried away captives, "That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place."

How did God cause this prophecy by one of His servants to be fulfilled? It is told plainly and simply in the first chapter of the book of Ezra:

"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah."

"THAT THE PROPHECY MIGHT BE FULFILLED"

First, let us consider the phrase, "That the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled." A similar phrase, "That the prophecy might be fulfilled," which appears often in both the Old and New Testament, is sometimes necessary to an understanding of the passage in which it occurs.

For instance, take the 36th, 37th and 38th verses of the 22d chapter of Luke; the phrase "And he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one," has often been quoted in support of war, but the following verse explains it and gives to it an entirely different meaning. Immediately following the words above quoted we read:

"For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end."

Why did Christ advise His disciples that they sell their garments and buy a sword? "That this that is written must yet be accomplished in me." And what was it that must yet be accomplished? What prophecy must yet be fulfilled? "And he was reckoned among the transgressors." The sword was the symbol of resistance to the law; it put the bearer of the sword among the transgressors.

The disciples answered, "Lord, behold, here are two swords. And He said unto them, It is enough." Two swords were not sufficient for the protection of Christ on the night of His betrayal