

# “Judgment and Salvation”

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Our text today is Daniel 6:24: “The king then gave orders, and they brought those men who had maliciously accused Daniel, and they cast them, their children and their wives into the lions' den; and they had not reached the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.”

A sharp contrast is to be seen between verse 23 and 24: in 23 – the King was exceedingly glad; in 24 – the King is exceedingly mad. One question we will have to wrestle with is: Was the King exceedingly bad?

What does this verse teach us? Many pass over it almost in silence. One commentator has this to say: “The grisly fate of the conspirators and their families is recorded without comment.” (Fyall) But that doesn't stop us from commenting!

Whatever else this verse teaches, it must include this truth found all throughout the Bible: “Whoso digs a pit shall fall therein, and he that rolls a stone, it will return upon him.” Proverbs 26:27 Or Proverbs 11:8 “The righteous is delivered from trouble, but the wicked takes his place.” Or how about Psalm 7:15 “He has dug a pit and hollowed it out, and has fallen into the hole which he made.” Or what about Ps. 50:22: “Now consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear *you* in pieces, and there will be none to deliver.”

“This is surely a bloody sequel,” says the Lutheran Leupold. And Matthew Henry writes: “Daniel's persecutors are consigned to the same prison, or place of execution.”

The text is straightforward. First, the command of justice (touching on the authority and swiftness of the act. Then the cruel crime is

recounted. Then the criminals and their whole households are cast in the same place they had brought Daniel. And last, the ferocious consequence of their crime is recounted.

Rather than going from point to point, let us peel this verse back layer by layer, and consider what it holds in that way.

At the first, this passage teaches that it was a true wonder which rescued Daniel. What could not hurt poor, weak, helpless, old but believing and godly Daniel, absolutely destroys these many, strong, gifted, younger but unbelieving and malicious accusers. It was no trick. The lions were quite hungry when Daniel was placed into their den, yet not a scratch! These were not tame pussycats, as the ringleaders found out all too well.

This account demonstrates the Lord's virtue, says Calvin. Such a stark contrast between being all night in their midst, in darkness, trapped with them, with their devouring each life tossed to them, like sweet treats to their hungry appetites – so much so that they did not even touch the floor before they were killed and their bones crushed to powder!

Sean Lucas makes the text to only attest to the miracle of protecting Daniel from this same fate. That may be the best lesson, but is it all?

There is more, we believe. There is the action of the king involved in this matter. Some pass it over because they see nothing more than an ancient oriental tyrant flexing his muscles. There is no hearing or trial. This is the “custom of the arbitrary tyrants of the East,” says Poole.

And not only the conspirators are destroyed, but their very families. This act was in accord with known Persian customs. The ancient

historian Herodotus and a Roman historian named Marcellinus refer to this practice, which they refer to as abominable – all relatives paying for the crime of one. The Macedonians had similar punishments for crimes against the king, such as treason or attempted murder.

Why such a punishment? Well, the intent was two-fold: to cut off the possibility of family revenge; plus this would serve to be dreadful, drastic deterrent to others thinking about a similar crime against the king.

But then, isn't this something to show us how justice is not to be done? Deuteronomy 24:16 forbids the children being put to death for the fathers and the fathers for the children.

But couldn't it be – as is often the case – a gruesome portrait of God's mysterious providence, which draws a straight line of justice with a crooked stick? We of course would have desired mercy and restoration upon repentance. And God's heart beats in the same way and direction.

Nevertheless, God is governor of this world, and his judgments are found in the earth. Leupold balances well the matter: “If an element of divine justice appears in this, that all the plotters experienced the very fate that they had designed for Daniel, that may well be recorded as a rather striking thing, a startling proof, of divine retribution.”

This is no model then to be followed for human justice. It is cruel, inhuman, vengeful against the innocent of the house. But it is a model of the Lord's turning evil upon itself. What they intended to be Daniel's end is theirs! This is the same as in the case of Haman hanging from his own rope. What they did was devour this righteous man, and they instead were devoured in every piece. The sharp teeth

of their malice and envy in their souls are turned upon themselves. They hoped Daniel's power and authority would be swallowed whole, but instead, they die so cruelly with their very wives and children!

Daniel, whose very name means "God is my Judge", looks to a higher hand at work. But before coming there, with the overruling of the king, let's peel deeper to the actual crime for which he cast them into the den of lions.

This was not a personal and private offense. This was an attack upon the crown, ultimately, and an attack against one of the highest ranking officers of the throne.

Recall that the king himself had been manipulated by those who were to be his counsellors. They had to know what was in store for them if found out. Furthermore, it is attempted murder. They knew, with premeditation, what they were trying to accomplish. The Aramaic word for slander is a "singularly strong metaphor" = it is to "eat the pieces of a man"!

So the words of Dt. 19:18-21, law of retaliation against false accusers, would come into play:

"The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness *and* he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you. Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

Furthermore, on the death of the families, these men were most likely not young fathers with little babies in their arms. They were known for their wisdom, and probably between the ages of 40 or 50 or beyond. Their wives were fixtures in that high and powerful society. And their

sons and daughters were perhaps adult extensions of each of their powerful places. If this is so, there may very well be more involvement on their parts, than what looks to us as innocent bystanders. If this is the case, it shows more an ‘eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth scenario.

This does seem to me however the least probable. But even if there was no participation by the families, who does not see that the actions of fathers has a clear impact upon the lives of their children? Sons and daughters follow the wayward drunken path of an intemperate father. Babies are born with the addiction in their blood received from their drug-using mother. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, in judgment.

We move on however to one more and final layer: the connection of judgment and destruction as the backdrop of salvation. “Vindication for Daniel” says Ralph Davis, “involves retribution for his enemies.” The whole point of the atonement for sin; the whole point of the cross of Jesus; the whole message of the gospel; is the whole answer for the coming judgment –seen in outline form in this passage.

A man by the name of James Hamilton has written full-length study of this theme running throughout the whole Bible. His book is called: “God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment.”

He explains:

*Everyone who gets saved is saved through judgment. All who flee to Christ and confess that he is Lord and that God raised him from the dead (Romans 10:9) do so because they realize their need for a Savior. They realize their need for a Savior because they have become convinced that God is holy, that they are sinful, and that God will judge. In a sense, they feel the force of God’s condemning justice. They sense the weight of the wrath that*

*remains upon them, John 3:36. They recognize that Jesus is their only hope. Thus historically, in Christ on the cross, and personally, in their own experience of the wrath of God that makes them feel their need for Christ, believers are saved through judgment. p. 58*

You can see this all throughout the Scriptures. In the deliverance of Eve, the serpent and his seed must be crushed in the head. In rescuing Noah, the world drowns. In saving Lot as brand from the burning, Sodom and Gomorrah are buried beneath everlasting fire. In redeeming Israel, Egypt is immersed in the Red Sea. And in giving Canaan, the land of promise, the wicked tribes of that place are all destroyed.

Sinclair Ferguson put it this way: “In a fallen and sinful world, there is a somber side to the salvation of God’s people.” Daniel passes through the jaws and paws of the lions; but the wicked are taken in their sin.

We are all guilty before God – the whole world is indicted and condemned already. In saving a people from the wrath to come, they must be judged, and they are, in Christ, in his cross. But the same wrath is brought upon the wicked; that is what we, in our best estate, deserve. We are no better than they, except that we have been changed, which does not add a snowflake to the complete justification we have by the cross of Christ.

This seems to be the message of Psalm 7, cited in part earlier, but worthy of a full hearing as we close.

O LORD my God, in You I have taken refuge; save me from all those who pursue me, and deliver me, or he will tear my soul like a lion, dragging me away, while there is none to deliver. O LORD my God, if I have done this, if there is injustice in my hands, if I have rewarded evil to my friend, or have plundered him who without cause was my

adversary, let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake *it*; and let him trample my life down to the ground and lay my glory in the dust. Arise, O LORD, in Your anger; lift up Yourself against the rage of my adversaries, and arouse Yourself for me; You have appointed judgment. Let the assembly of the peoples encompass You, and over them return on high. The LORD judges the peoples; vindicate me, O LORD, according to my righteousness and my integrity that is in me. O let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous; for the righteous God tries the hearts and minds. My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart. God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day. If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready. He has also prepared for Himself deadly weapons; He makes His arrows fiery shafts. Behold, he travails with wickedness, and he conceives mischief and brings forth falsehood. He has dug a pit and hollowed it out, and has fallen into the hole which he made. His mischief will return upon his own head, and his violence will descend upon his own pate. I will give thanks to the LORD according to His righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High. (Psa 7:1-17)

It is a most fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Let this be our final thought today, as we have been snatched from the paw of Satan, that roaring lion who goes about seeking whom he may devour!

Dear friend – how do you defeat a lion? Get a bigger lion! Jesus is the lion of the tribe of Judah! And what will you do without Him? Or if He be your enemy for your sins? Oh, be warned today! "**Now consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you in pieces, and there will be none to deliver.**" (Psa 50:22)