

LIONS, FIRES & THE GOD WHO REIGNS

**DANIEL - SMALLGROUP NOTES
ALL SAINTS CHURCH, WICK**

Small-group Notes

These notes are intended to run alongside our preaching series on Sundays and the introduction notes. The talks will be online shortly after they are preached and a copy of the talk and further reading will be sent to homegroup leaders. I've given a suggested opening discussion or activity. This is designed to get everyone thinking about the themes that are likely to come up before you get into the study. Then, having read the passage together, there are discussion starter questions. Again, your group might move into other areas or pick up on other things from the passage. Hopefully, our aim is always to let God's Spirit apply God's Word to our hearts. To discover what God was saying to the original hearers, and then consider what that means for us today.

As Daniel is focussed on living faithfully, I've included a section to consider the practical (or discipleship) application. *What does this mean day to day? Where is God calling us to be faithful like Daniel? And what does that look like in 21st century Sussex?* Then there are suggestions for prayer, to go alongside your regular prayer for another in the group. Finally, some suggestions for digging deeper into the word if you have time or for group members to consider in-between when you meet.

Resources

Copies of these notes, the Introduction to Daniel and the sermons as they are preached will be available in the Resources section of allsaintswick.org.uk

Plan

Week 1 - (Sermon preached on) 27th May, 2018

Week 2 - 3rd June (7pm)

Week 3 - 10th June

Week 4 - 17th June

Week 5 - 24th June

Week 6 - 1st July (7pm)

Week 7 - 8th July

Week 8 - 15th July

Week 9 - 22nd July

Week 10 - 29th July

Week 1: Lions, Fires & Faithfulness; the Story of Daniel's God

For the first week it would be good to give people a chance to read through the main introduction, if they haven't already. As a starter question, it might be good to ask what people know of the story, without making anyone feel proud/sad for their current understanding - God has something to say to us all through this dramatic book.

Read Daniel 1:1-7

Discussion Starters

How would they have felt, not only were they defeated, but the temple goods were carried off to a pagan land? (v2)

How startling is v2 that 'the Lord' delivered the king of Judah into Babylon's hands? (see Jeremiah 25:3-9)

But what does that already tell us about who is really in control?

Vv3-5, Why might the Babylonians take these Israelites into their society?

How much culture shock would they feel?

Do we feel culture shock when the world around us challenges our faith?

What is the significance of their change of names?

Do you ever feel the pressure of the world's labelling?

What does Jesus call you?

Living Faithfully (Application)

Can you help each other identify particular situations in your life, where there is a challenge to your faith - where are your pinch points in trying to be faithful?

Prayer Suggestions

As well as prayers for each other, and recognising how the world around can influence our beliefs, it would be good to pray for those in education settings where faith comes under extreme pressure.

Digging Deeper (If you have time, or during the week)

Reflect on Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Jeremiah 29:1-14, how can we faithfully apply this to our situations?

Week 2: In the world but not of the world

Does anyone have a testimony of God giving wisdom to deal with a potentially difficult situation?

Read Daniel 1:8-21

Discussion

V8 - why do you think they accepted new names, but took a stand on royal food and wine?

What was the manner of their opposition - confrontational or gracious?

What might be an equivalent situation for Christians today?

How can we take a stand for our faith in a gracious way?

V11-14 - Is this passage a lesson on diets, or teaching about trusting God?

From v15-20, in what ways does God gift and help Daniel and his peers?

What gifts does the Holy Spirit bring to God's people these days to help us live faithfully?

What is the significance of v21?

Living Faithfully

Are there situations you can safely share with each other, where you feel pressure to go along with something you don't believe is right? Is there wisdom within the group for how to be faithful in a gracious manner in that situation?

Prayer Suggestions

Pray for gifts of wisdom to know not only when to take a stand for what we believe, but how to do so in a gracious and Christ-like way.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on Romans 12:1-2, how do we (like Daniel) discern God's will and avoid conforming to this world?

Week 3: Seeking the God who speaks

You might like someone to read the following introduction, which summarises the first part of chapter 2:

‘In chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream and he demands that his own magicians tell him both the dream and its meaning. They can’t, so he threatens them with death. Daniel finds out that he and his friends are also in danger and we pick up the story in v17...’

Read Daniel 2:17-30

Discussion

Why are the King’s interpreters unable to explain his dream?

What is Daniel’s first response and what does he ask his friends to do?

Do we share Daniel’s priorities of fellowship and prayer in crisis?

How does Daniel come to know the meaning of the dream? (v19)

What does this revelation lead Daniel to do in vv20-23

And what can we learn about God from Daniel’s praise and worship?

How does Daniel use this situation as an opportunity to talk about the true God? Vv27-28

What sorts of opportunities do we have to point people to the Lord?

How easy do you find it to take up those opportunities?

Living Faithfully

Daniel believes in a God who speaks, and who he can speak to. Can you share and encourage each other with ways you’ve found helpful for hearing from God’s word and speaking to God in prayer.

Prayer Suggestions

Perhaps it would be good to spend some time saying sorry to the Lord for when we don’t turn to him in prayer. Then you might like to spend some time sharing and praying for any difficult situations faced by members of the group.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on Hebrews 1:1-3 - how has God’s communication become even clearer for us than in Daniel’s day?

Week 4: Worshipping the God who reveals

Do you enjoy 'history'? What is your favourite era/subject and why?

Read Daniel 2:31-49

Discussion

What is the overall meaning of the King's dream?

If the metals are human kingdoms, what's different about the rock? (v34)

How does Jesus later apply this imagery to himself? [See Luke 20:17-19]

So, how does Jesus' kingdom differ from Babylon, Persia, Rome, and all earthly kingdoms? (vv44-45)

vv46-49, how does God use this whole situation to advance his purposes?

What does this remind us about the longevity of nations and rulers?

But should Daniel's example lead us to withdraw or to engage with our world?

Should Christians be involved in politics?

How does Nebuchadnezzar respond to Daniel's message?

Do you find that encouraging for thinking about our sharing of God's word with others?

Living Faithfully

What does it mean to be a member of God's Kingdom through Christ?

How should our lives be distinctive, since our King's rule will last forever?

Prayer Suggestions

A good week to pray internationally, particularly for those with authority, and that God's kingdom would come.

Digging Deeper

We've been thinking about God's Kingdom coming. You might like to read through Matthew 5&6 and reflect on Jesus' focus on kingdom and what Kingdom living entails.

Week 5: Saved through Fire

Are there places on your heart and in your prayers, where Christians face particular persecution for their faith? If not, are you familiar with Open Doors, Christian Solidarity Worldwide? Barnabus Fund?

Read Daniel 3

Discussion

What seems to have happened to Nebuchadnezzar since the end of chapter 2? The list of officials is repeated several times, what effect is the writer looking for? Why is worship of idols an issue on which they must take a stand? [Deut 5:8] Vv16-18, is their confidence based on belief that God will definitely save them, or is there an 'even if'?

Is that a helpful reminder that being faithful doesn't always mean that Christians will be physically saved?

What can we do to support persecuted believers?

Re-read v25 and take in the significance. Not only unharmed but a 4th person has joined them!

How does God use their faithfulness to demonstrate what he is like? (vv28-29)

Do you have a story of God bringing good from a situation where you had to speak out in faith?

Living Faithfully

Is there anything you're going through right now, where you would love to know a greater sense of Jesus' presence with you? Perhaps those who feel able to share could be prayed for by others.

Prayer Suggestions

None of us are perfect and may have times we wish we'd done or said more for what we believe is right. Let's pray and thank God for his forgiveness for those times, his faithfulness to us, and for the courage to be obedient to Jesus.

Digging Deeper

Read through the 10 commandments in Exodus 20. Do you love and trust God's law like the writer of Psalm 1?

Week 6: Our God Reigns

It's a longer chapter this week, so you might like to use the time to read the full story of 4:1-27, or use the following summary of verses 1-18:

'King Nebuchadnezzar has another dream and again his magicians cannot interpret it. It is a dream of a large tree seen from all the earth. But a holy messenger announces it will be felled and the person involved will live for a time like a wild animal. The King asks Daniel to seek God for the meaning.'

Read Daniel 4:19-27

Discussion

Why do you think Nebuchadnezzar does describe the dream this time?

What clues do we get to the relationship between him and Daniel in v19?

Is this evidence of how God has given Daniel favour during his time in Babylon?

In vv20-21, how might the king feel at the first part of the dream?

But what is the main message of the dream God gave him? (vv24-26)

Is the context helpful? (It was very bad to have an uninterpreted dream)

What is Daniel's advice to the King? (v27)

Is that specific advice for the King, or can it apply to us and more generally?

How does that relate to the gospel of Jesus' death on behalf of sinners?

Living Faithfully

Nebuchadnezzar is advised to make real repentance, involving changed actions. Is there a situation God is prompting you to take real steps to change?

Prayer Suggestions

A good week to pray for the message of the gospel, locally and internationally. To cry out for non-believers to turn and receive forgiveness and new life in Christ. You might like to name them out loud, or write them down or use other ways of responding in prayer.

Digging Deeper

You might enjoy comparing this image of an earthly kingdom as a tree with the parable Jesus tells in Luke 13:18-19. Do you think he's making a direct reference, and if so, what is he saying?

Week 7: God gives grace to the humble

This is the second half of chapter 4, where things get worse for Nebuchadnezzar, in order that he might turn to the true God and be restored and changed. Does anyone have a story of God bringing good out of difficulty?

Read Daniel 4:28-37

Discussion

12 months later last week's word comes true, how often is God's timing different to ours?

In v30, how does the King ignore the warning Daniel had given him?

Why is pride such a dangerous sin? [see Jesus warning in Matthew 23:2-12]

The result seems harsh, so why would God allow such a thing to happen in this specific situation?

What is it that prompts the change in him and his situation?

How do some of the themes of the book come through in vv34&35?

Is Nebuchadnezzar better off by the end of the chapter, even though he suffered in the middle?

Does God allow us to suffer, if we grow in faith and love for him?

Are we in the habit of praising God when things are going smoothly too?

Living Faithfully

Pride is such an easy thing to slip into, are there areas of your life which you could benefit from turning to praise and thanks to God? We don't need false humility, be honest about strengths, but give God the glory!

Prayer Suggestions

There may be people in the group or known to you who are in need of God's restoration. Let's lift them to the Lord in prayer asking for his grace and mercy.

Digging Deeper

You may like to read and reflect on how these themes apply to us in James 4:1-10

Week 8: The Writing's on the Wall

Discussion: Do you still hear people use the phrase 'The writing's on the wall?' and do you think they know where it comes from?

Read Daniel 5:1-11

Short Discussion

What is offensive about Belshazzar's actions with their temple silverware? Is there a contemporary equivalent for non-believers disrespecting the Lord?

Read Daniel 17-31

Discussion

What does Daniel make of the King's offer of reward?

What does Daniel care about more than riches?

Why should Belshazzar know better?

Is there a difference now for people who have no upbringing in the Christian faith?

Do you find Belshazzar's response interesting given Daniel's clear interpretation?

How can we communicate graciously but courageously that all people need to honour the Lord?

Does living this side of the cross change the way we share what we believe?

Living Faithfully

Daniel wasn't tempted by worldly riches, he simply wanted to explain God's word to the King. How can we help each other ensure we have our eyes fixed on Jesus as our true and great reward?

Prayer Suggestions

People around us are ignoring the Word of God. That is a big thing, but it is not bigger than God's power to change hearts. Let's pray for them, for the grace of the gospel to transform through faith in Christ.

Week 9: Where, O death, is your sting?

Does anyone have a story to share of when God has saved them from a difficult or dangerous situation? Perhaps someone has a story when they wished God had and, for some reason, he didn't?

Read Daniel 6

Discussion

Why do the other ministers resent Daniel? (vv1-5)

Does our faith ever cause others to resent or envy us?

How do they speak to Darius to get what they want?

What is Daniel's response? (v10)

Would it have been wrong for Daniel to simply pray in private? Discuss...!

Should our faith be public or could we simply practise in private?

Why was Darius pleased that God saved Daniel?

V24 is hard to hear. Is the Bible condoning Darius' action or simply reporting it?

What is particularly remarkable about his decree? (vv26-27)

Should we expect rescue from all dangers in this life, or is it pointing to a different rescue?

Living Faithfully

There may be situations you are in, or will face, when you have to choose between remaining faithful or facing opposition. It's helpful to be prepared in advance should the situation arise. How will you respond?

Prayer Suggestions

Pray for Christians in the workplace. Like for Daniel, that they would be a good witness especially when their faith is opposed.

Digging Deeper

Is there a danger that we understand ch6 to say, "if you only have enough faith God will never allow you to suffer?"

How does the rest of Scripture, including Jesus, teach that this cannot be the correct application?

Week 10: Behold the Son of Man

Honesty time... Do you feel like God really is in control? Why is that often hard to believe?

Read Daniel 7:1-14

Discussion

What is different about this dream to the earlier ones in Daniel?

Does the Bible teach that God will still speak through dreams to 'New Testament' Christians?

Are you happy with the interpretation of the beasts in the sermon?

Can we disagree on the specific interpretation, but still agree on the main point of the dream?

Do you think v9 has contributed to the popular idea of what God looks like?

What do you think vv9-10 are really trying to say about what God is like?

I was once set a 3,000 word essay question: 'Who is the one like a Son of Man in Daniel 7?' Can you answer in one word?

How do you feel about this figure here in the Old Testament, is your faith strengthened?

Are you looking forward to the day when we see Jesus in all his glory?

Living Faithfully

Trusting God is not easy when life is hard, and when the international situations are bleak. Is there something you can take from our studies that will help you to live with greater trust that God is in control?

Prayer Suggestions

Perhaps pray short prayers of thanks, especially encouraging those who don't find it easy to pray out loud. It can be just one or two words to thank the Lord for this vision of his ultimate victory and eternal rule of his kingdom.

For now, we're pausing our study in Daniel at the end of Chapter 7. I hope to return and complete it so that we're not missing parts of the Bible. In the meantime, this is a short but helpful article which covers additional points:

thegospelcoalition.org/article/jesus-in-the-lions-den-preaching-christ-from-daniel