

the

the
PITS

we've all been there

An Order of Worship for the Home

September 27, 2020
The Pits – week 1 – Daniel

This service is written for two speakers. Ideally, family members can speak and declare God's grace to one another following this format. For those who live alone, this worship outline can be followed with a brother or sister in Christ over the phone. You may call on a friend to fill this role, or your elder or pastor can worship with you by phone.

There is an "offering prayer" included in this outline. As we shelter in place, please continue to worship through giving. You can mail offering envelopes and checks to Calvary or visit www.calvaryslz.org to give online.

Invocation

Reader 1: We gather to worship. We gather to pray.
Reader 2: We gather to our God and to his word.
Reader 1: We gather in the name of our God who is...
Reader 2: Father, Son and Holy Spirit...
Together: Amen.

Psalm 40:1-3

¹ I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.

² He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.

³ He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the Lord.

Message, Part 1

People in Power May Throw You in the Pit

I took a trip to Zion National Park some years back. I remember exploring a small canyon with a stream running through it. It was maybe 10 feet wide with 30 foot sandstone walls on either side. I hiked about a mile up this canyon and found a small waterfall pouring over the sandstone wall. I also found a dead-end. The walls around were all too steep to be climbed. I had to go back the way I came from.

I had three walls around me. That was a dead-end. Add one more unclimbable wall, and you've got a pit. We all hit dead-ends in life from time-to-time – a job that doesn't come through; a test you have to re-take; a relationship that bottoms out. We backtrack, and eventually find a way to move forward again.

But sometimes, we can find ourselves in a pit. It's beyond our ability to backtrack. We can't get ourselves out of the situation. We're helpless to do anything but shout out in hope that someone will hear us. When you're in a pit, you need help from someone else. That's what this series is about.

Today, I want us to recognize this: Sometimes the people in power will throw you in the pit. How do you react when that happens? What do you do? There's a story in the Bible which gives us some direction.

After their repeated disobedience, God gave his people, Israel, into the hands of the Babylonians. Israelites from Jerusalem were taken from their country and forced to make a new life in the city of Babylon. Daniel was among these exiles. He was selected for training and service within the government, and proved himself a valuable counselor to several kings. After some time, Babylon fell to the Persian Empire. As Darius, the Persian King, came into power, Daniel found himself serving in a new setting.

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; ² and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. (Daniel 6:1-2)

This is the ultimate in reality TV (if that had been invented at the time.) King Darius needs leaders to govern the lands he has now acquired, and it helps greatly if those leaders are familiar with the people and customs of the lands. So, he starts with the men who are already in place. He places local jurisdiction in the hands of 120 satraps. Even more importantly, he needs one man who will oversee the 120. Who is the best choice? Who will govern well, and prove themselves faithful to the new king? Darius chooses three men to compete for the job. This is an early version of “The Apprentice.” Daniel is one of the three contestants.

³ Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. (Daniel 6:3)

We have a winner! It looks as if Daniel will get the top job. However, this is where the real story begins.

⁴ Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. ⁵ Then these men said, “We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.” (Daniel 6:4-5)

Did you notice that description? It said of Daniel, “he was faithful” – to a pagan king! That’s how Daniel won the competition, but now the real story begins.

This is politics, and there are groups conspiring to take control where they fear losing power and influence. In the next part of the story our reading says a group of leaders come “by agreement”, but what that really means is they bring a noisy, clamoring crowd creating excitement for their idea.

⁶ Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, “O King Darius, live forever! ⁷ All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. (Daniel 6:6-7)

Understand this, Darius is not necessarily claiming to be a god. If he was, there would not have been a 30 day limit. Instead, he’s positioning himself as a priest for every religion. When the Babylonian Empire was under attack, idols from throughout the empire were brought to the capital city in hopes of protecting the empire. Those idols of wood and stone have not yet been returned to their local temples, so local priests are unable to offer prayers for people in those places. King Darius will graciously offer to serve as priest for all the people he now rules. This is his attempt to ingratiate his new subjects while their gods are returned during the coming 30 day period. Prayer may be spiritual activity, but this proclamation from Darius is all about politics.

⁸ Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.” ⁹ Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction. (Daniel 6:8-9)

The trap is set. There is a new rule about prayer. Yet, this is not the same as an earlier story from Daniel where his contemporaries were commanded to worship an idol. Daniel could chose not to pray. The new rule says *if* he prays, there’s only one person through whom he can pray. Daniel could simply take a break from praying. Would that be a safe position to take?

We fall into this thinking. We legitimize non-action.

- I can believe in Jesus without actually spending time in worship, prayer, or reading his word. We tell ourselves this works because I haven’t sworn allegiance to any other faith.
- I can be a Christian without allowing that to impact my budget. We tell ourselves that if following Jesus directs how I use money, then I’m actually practicing some type of works-righteousness. By that logic it’s safer to keep faith and finances separate.

But that's not how Daniel sees things. That doesn't square with the identity he has as one of God's people. God has not called Daniel to take the fewest faithful actions so as to offend the smallest number of people. God has called Daniel to faithfulness. "You shall have no other gods before me," and "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" are among the callings God has placed before his people. It's not enough for Daniel to avoid the wrong thing. He's called to do the right thing. He's in a tough spot.

But, do you remember the psalm we read earlier?

*I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry. (Psalm 40:1)*

You and I will wait too, and come back to Daniel's story in a bit.

Confession & Absolution

Make sure each person present has opportunity to confess to a brother or sister in faith. Go through both parts as many times as needed to accommodate all who are gathered.

Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back. (Isaiah 38:17)

Christian Confessing: My disobedience is a pit which I have fallen into. My loss of hope is a pit from which I cannot escape. I want to be forgiven. I want to have a stronger faith. God, redeem my life from the pit.

Christian Responding: Your God knows the pitfalls of your life. Not only that, he sent his Son to the pit of death in order to rescue you. In Christ you are forgiven! By his new life, you have new life as well. He is the God who redeems your life from the pit.

Together: Amen.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit...*

(Psalm 103:2-4a)

Message, Part 2

*I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry. (Psalm 40:1)*

Daniel cannot seek the path of least resistance. He must keep walking the path of a believer. However, Daniel will not find his own way out of this. He will wait patiently for the Lord.

*¹⁰ When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, **as he had done previously.** (Daniel 6:10)*

This is not a protest, but a continuation. This is not gathering with others in public spaces (that wasn't allowed). Instead, this is Daniel continuing his personal practice of prayer and devotion.

¹¹ Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. ¹² Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, "O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked." ¹³ Then they answered and said before the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day." (Daniel 6:11-13)

He is "one of the exiles." He "pays no attention to you, O king." Daniel's enemies create a false narrative. According to them, Daniel's loyalty to God is dangerous. His faith will compromise his ability to serve you and the country you lead.

You've heard similar things. It's been said that Christians are dangerous because they hold to a moral code which oppresses certain groups. Some perceive that

people who follow Jesus are trying to undermine science, or government, or schools.

But, the people of God do not go looking for a fight when we hear these things. The arguments may not hold logic, but that doesn't mean we have to argue. Daniel didn't seek out opportunity to prove his righteousness before society. He didn't care as much about how the world saw him. He cared about how God saw him.

*I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry. (Psalm 40:1)*

¹⁴ Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. (Daniel 6:14)

Interesting...the king wasn't swayed by his other counselors. He'd only worked with Daniel for a few months, but he knew Daniel was a good man. He didn't see Daniel's faith getting in the way of Daniel's service to the state. The king knew he'd been tricked.

*¹⁵ Then these men came by agreement to the king...
(Daniel 6:15a)*

There's the phrase again, "by agreement." This group is always presenting itself as a crowd. It's as if they want to make sure no other voices are heard.

...and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed."

¹⁶ Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" ¹⁷ And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. ¹⁸ Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him. (Daniel 6:15-18)

The pit is sealed with the king's ring, but also with the rings of his lords. The seals would not allow the king to interfere. He could not attempt to rescue Daniel. It also would not allow Daniel's accusers to interfere.

Daniel's in the pit. The people in power put him there. It might happen to you. People in power may throw you in the pit.

What would you do?

- Protest?
- Promote your rights?
- Or, seek out a path of least resistance? – the path of fewest faithful actions so you offend the least number of people?

Or, would you do like Daniel? Would you continue in faithful action? Would you wait patiently on the Lord?

You and I will wait once more for the rest of Daniel's story, as we continue our worship by confessing our faith.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Matthew 5:1-12

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons^[a] of God.

¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Message: Part 3

Back to our story: Daniel is in the pit. The people in power have put him there.

The king spent an anxious night. Yet, we hear nothing about Daniel's night. We'll hear about that in the morning. We'll find out that an angel comes to him from God. I doubt it was an anxious night for Daniel. It was probably a peaceful night, a reassuring night. His worries were over. He waited patiently for the Lord, and the Lord answered!

*He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure. (Psalm 40:2)*

¹⁹ Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. ²⁰ As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” ²¹ Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! ²² My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.” ²³ Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So

Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. (Daniel 6:19-23)

*He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure. (Psalm 40:2)*

This is how our God works. This is what our God does. The people in power may throw you in the pit. God's power acts differently.

**God's power doesn't send you to the pit.
God's power descends to you in the pit.**

God has been in the pit. In fact, he's been in the pit for you. In Daniel's story we see Jesus foreshadowed:

- Jesus and Daniel were both falsely charged with crimes related to their faithfulness to God.
- Both had crowds accuse them of religious crimes before pagan rulers.
- In both cases, their judge sees their innocence and attempts to set them free.
- Both judges – Pontius Pilate, and Darius the Mede – eventually cave to the demands of the crowds.
- Daniel and Jesus are placed in a pit and a tomb, respectively, with a rock rolled in front of the entrance.
- Both entrances are sealed to prevent tampering.
- Friends come to visit both of these “pits” early in the morning, and in both cases – much to their astonishment – where death intended to reign they find life! Daniel survived the night in the lions' den. Jesus rose to new new life from the tomb.

If people in power have you in a pit, wait patiently for the Lord. The God who knows the pit also knows the way out. He is the way out. He is Daniel's Savior and yours!

*He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.*

³ *He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the Lord. (Psalm 40:2-3)*

Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Share prayer requests with one another. Pray over the requests shared, then pray the Lord's Prayer together.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Offering Prayer

If you have an offering present as you worship, you may place your hands over it during the offering prayer.

Reader 1: With thankful hearts we receive from you, O Lord.
Reader 2: With thankful hearts we respond.
Reader 1: Receive our thanks and praise.
Reader 2: Receive our offerings.
Together: Receive us as your own.

Blessing (Jude, v24-25)

Reader 1: Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,
Reader 2: to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Reader 1: be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority,
Reader 2: before all time and now and forever.
Together: Amen.

As applicable, please share this resource with others who would benefit. An electronic version is available at www.calvaryslz.org. We can also add friends to our mailing list if that is preferred.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.