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Jesus in the Lions' Den

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For Good Friday, I explore some of the parallels between Jesus and Daniel.

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today, I would usually be doing a question and answer video, but because it's Good Friday, I thought I'd do something different. And what I will do is a study of some death and resurrection themes in the Old Testament, and most particularly in the story of Daniel.

Jesus in the Lions' Den. When we read the stories of the Old Testament, we can see there are several death and resurrection type narratives. In the story of Joseph, we've been looking through.

I did consider doing the story of Joseph, but decided against in the end. Joseph is someone who's betrayed by his brothers, sold for pieces of silver. He's someone who ends up down in the pit, and he has two criminals alongside him.

And one is raised up, one is brought down. He's someone who's eventually raised up to the right hand of the power, and he saves his brother. So it's a familiar story.

It's a pattern of death and resurrection. And there are many more details that can fill that out. But it's not the only one that we find in the Old Testament.

The story of the Exodus is another sort of death and resurrection narrative. Israel dead in the land of Egypt, and then brought out in a resurrection type experience. The story of Isaac and his father Abraham, and the binding of Isaac.

Again, it's a death and resurrection type story in certain respects. I've already commented upon the connections between the story of Joseph and the story of the binding of Isaac, and that's worth bearing in mind. It helps us to see, among other things, that these stories are not hermetically sealed from each other.

And many people read the Old Testament as if it were just this grab bag of different stories that you can relate to Christ in an isolated manner. But no, these themes are developed over a series of stories. So the story of Joseph, which has all sorts of parallels with the story of Christ, is a replay and a development of the theme of the binding of Isaac.

It's a familiar story, but it's a story that's developing and becoming more complex. It's unworking some of the patterns. It's replaying some of the other patterns.

And so we need to read them in terms of this wider narrative that we're given. Not just in terms of isolated stories, but in terms of these related narratives. And when we come to later stories in the Old Testament, we'll see that many of them bear the marks of the stories of Genesis.

So the story of David has many parallels with the story of Joseph. David is the one who shepherds his father's sheep, who's rejected by his brothers, who's sent to bring a message to them. The one who ends up rising up to the right hand of the king.

He's the one who receives initially favour with the king. And many other patterns beside that. That's just a very initial series of some of the connections between David and Joseph.

There are far more than that. We can see the same thing in the story of Jonah. Jonah's swallowed up by the big fish when he's cast into the sea.

And then later vomited out onto dry land. It's three days that happens. Three days and three nights in the belly of the fish.

These are death and resurrection patterns. When we come to the story of Daniel, we can see that it's not an isolated story. Daniel is a Joseph type figure.

Daniel is someone who is taken into a foreign land. He's an exile. He's someone who's who is faithful in that realm and proves his wisdom in the interpretation of dreams.

And as he proves his faithfulness and as he is a gifted interpreter of dreams of the ruler of this foreign realm, he is raised up to become as if, as it were, second only to the king. He's someone who becomes very powerful in pretty much exactly the same way as we see in the story of Joseph. We'll also see a similar thing in the story of Mordecai.

And we'll get into that a bit more at some point in my videos. But Mordecai again is someone who is faithful. And he's faithful to the king in a difficult situation.

And he's faced with this rival, this false accuser Haman, who seeks to destroy him. And much as there's the false accuser of Potiphar's wife, but, and the satraps and others in the story of Daniel, but he is protected. And in the middle of the night the king can't sleep.

He reads the records and he sees that Mordecai hasn't been rewarded for his faithfulness. And then Mordecai is lifted up and Haman is the one to do it. And then Haman ends up being hung on his own gallows.

These are stories that are not isolated from each other. At the end of the story of Esther, we see this quite clearly. At the end of the story of Esther, we see that I can find it.

And king Ahasuerus imposed tribute on the land and on the islands of the sea. Now all the acts of his power and his might and the account of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king advanced him. Are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? For Mordecai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his kindred.

It's the same pattern. He is another Joseph. And within this story, we'll also see other parallels between the relationship between Judah and Benjamin.

So these are playing out stories that we have heard before. And this contrasts with the way that many people use Old Testament types, where they're just looking for isolated stories to think of parallels with the New Testament. And that's not how types work.

Types work through time, not just abstracted from time and comparing things across time. When we're comparing in that sort of way, we're abstracting from the movement of God's history, where these things are developing in particular ways. So by the time Christ comes along, these are well-worn channels of typology.

And Christ steps into channels that are already charged with meaning and they have a flow of meaning already moving along them and then Christ comes into that. When we read the story of Christ, then we need to think back to all these different related stories

and bring them together, recognize their unity, a unity that is established ultimately in Christ, but a unity that also can be seen to some extent within the Old Testament. And when Christ says that all the things that the scriptures declare must be concerning him must be fulfilled, that all these things happened according to the scriptures, this is the sort of thing he's referring to.

Not a few isolated prophecies, not even a few isolated parallels that you can draw, but the deep weight of scriptural testimony in its stories and its prophecies, all moving towards that point. So when Christ comes, we recognize him. We recognize him as the one who's the son of Joseph, who's the son of David, who's the one that's greater than Moses, the prophet like Moses, who's the one who's like Elijah and Elisha.

He's the one that bears the marks of all these Old Testament stories. He's a new Daniel. He's a new son of man.

And that will help us to understand Christ so much better than just these isolated parallels. Now, let's get to the story of Daniel. The story of Daniel is one of a threat with lions.

And as we read the story of Daniel, we'll see that lions appear at a number of different points. The captain of King Nebuchadnezzar's guard is Arioch, which is lion-like. He's a lion-like figure.

And then later on, the first beast is a lion, and the lion is Babylon. Babylon is a lion's den. Babylon itself is like this realm that's a den of lions.

And so it's appropriate that when he suffers this fate in Babylon, that it should be within the lion's den. The lion symbolizes Babylon. Other things to notice is that this is a story that parallels in various ways with another martyr story within the book of Daniel, which is the story of the fiery furnace.

People being cast into this realm of judgment, whether it's the pit, the den that's down in the earth, the chamber in the earth, or whether it's the fiery furnace. This is kind of an image of being sent to a more ultimate judgment. It's the pit of Sheol.

It's the deeper judgment, the chamber of the earth that you're sent down into. And these two stories of martyrdom, or near martyrdom, this faithful witness born by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and then later on by Daniel against all the threats, that they are faithful worshippers of God, and they do not submit to idols. This is one of the ways that we can see that Israel is learning faithfulness in exile.

Israel has been, or Judah has been, characterized by idolatry. And now within this crucible of exile, they're learning to avoid idolatry, to overcome that particular sin that had so defined them in the centuries prior to that. The story starts with Daniel being set in a high position.

He's set over the, or Darius sets over the kingdom 120 satraps, and then over these three governors, and Daniel is one of those. And Daniel sets himself above even the people that he's working with, and the king is giving thought to setting him over the entire realm. So again, Joseph parallels, Mordecai parallels.

These are stories that should be read together. We're seeing a common thread emerge. And the governors and the satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom, but they could find no charge or fault because he was faithful, nor was there any error or fault found in him.

Again, these are things that should recall previous stories. It should recall the story of Haman and Mordecai. Haman trying to set a false charge, trying to destroy Mordecai.

And then later on we see the story of, earlier on, we see the story of Joseph, the false charge of Potiphar's wife. And these false charges seeking to destroy someone who is found to be innocent. When we come to the New Testament, this is what we see, that Christ is, they can find no true fault in him, and as a result, they bring false charges against him.

And the whole way that they try and find a charge against Daniel, how can they find a charge against him? Only concerning his God. We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God. And so they're trying to catch him out on the basis of his faithfulness.

And Christ, of course, is faithful. And in the same way, it has to be people who are using false testimony, who are trying to bring him down on the basis of his true witness to God. So the governors and satraps throng before the king and tell him to set up this decree.

And the decree, the royal statute, is that no person should petition any god or man for 30 days unless it's the king. And anyone who does that will be thrown into the den of lions. And so he has to establish the decree.

It's established according to the law of the Medes and Persians, and it cannot be broken. It cannot be altered. And so the king signs the decree.

This is a very ominous event. I mean, how is Daniel going to escape from this? And Daniel knows that it has been signed, and he goes straight into the site of danger. Just as we see Christ setting his face towards Jerusalem, when he knows that he's going to be destroyed by the chief priests and other leaders of the people who want to destroy him, his own people, the people that he's part of a company of, they reject him.

And this story again should remind us. Daniel knows that the writing was signed. He went home.

Where does he go? He goes to his upper room with the windows open towards

Jerusalem. He knelt down on his knees three times that day and prayed and gave thanks before his god, as was his custom since early days. We might think about the Christ going to the upper room immediately before he's taken, and then the different prayers that he prays, wrestling with God in the garden, praying three times.

Maybe that's related. I wouldn't put that much weight on that particular detail. But the men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his god.

And then they go and tell the king what has happened, that they've seen it. And Daniel, one of the captors of Judah, does not show due regard for your king or for the decrees that you've signed, but makes his petitions three times a day. So the king hears it, and he's greatly displeased with himself.

And he wants to deliver Daniel. He thinks of any way that he can do it, and he labors till the going down of the sun to deliver him. He's someone who's being used against his will to bring down a righteous man.

And the men, and the sun's going down, again, these are things that might recall the themes of darkness that play out in the story of Christ's crucifixion and the period prior to that. The men approach the king and say to the king, Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and the Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed. And again, what we see in these stories is these people who are falsely zealous for the authority of the king, they're wanting to supposedly establish the law of the king.

They want to establish his preeminence. And they're doing that in a way that's designed to bring down a righteous man. And we see similar things in the story of Pilate and the trials of Christ before Pilate.

That we have no king but Caesar. And the rule of the Romans being established. This is what we're concerned about, that the rule of the Romans must be maintained and that no king should be held above Caesar.

But then, of course, they're doing that not because they're zealous, truly zealous for Caesar's authority, but because they want to bring down this righteous man. And the king gives the command and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke saying to Daniel, your God whom you serve continually, he will deliver you.

Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed. Again, we've seen a pit and we've seen a pit with a stone over it. This is a story that should remind us of the story of the death and burial and the resurrection of Christ.

A pit with a seal over it. A great stone that prevents anything from coming out. Now, the king who establishes that guard as well is also that cover over the tomb is one who sets sentries there as well.

So it's just there are similar things playing out here. What the king does in this case though is he has a sleepless night. Like Ahasuerus in the story of Esther, he cannot sleep and he's fasting and he's not bringing any music in.

He's wrestling all night hoping that Daniel will be delivered. And he spends the night sleeplessly just hoping that Daniel would be preserved by his God. And what does he do? Early the next morning he arises and he goes with haste to the den of lions.

Early in the morning going with haste to the tomb is what we hear of the disciples later on in the story of the resurrection. And what does he find there? Does he find these bones of this dead body? No, he finds the living Daniel. Daniel that is has been faithful and has been preserved within the tomb within the den of lions.

And he calls to Daniel and has your God whom you serve continually been able to deliver you from the lions? And Daniel says my God sent his angel and shut the lion's mouths so that they have not hurt me because I was found innocent before him. And also king I have done no wrong before you. He's vindicated by God.

The angel taking away the tomb, taking away the grave the stone upon the tomb again, the angel comes and protects closes the mouths of the lions. There is a similar theme vindication by God by being raised up and the angel coming to act. And the king is exceedingly glad for him and commands that he be taken out.

Daniel's taken out. No injury is found on him because he believed in God. And then the king gives the command and all who had accused Daniel and their families are thrown into the den of lions themselves.

These reversals are things that might remind you of the parable of Christ where he talks about the treatment of the son that sent to the vineyard and the way that those who the wicked vine dressers who destroy the son then they are judged. And that might relate to the story of Joseph in some ways as well. He's the son, the love son that sent to his brothers and he's destroyed seemingly destroyed and then his brothers are judged.

They're not killed, but they are judged as a result. And after all this has happened king Darius writes to all peoples nations and languages that dwell in the all the earth peace be multiplied to you and make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel for he is the living God and steadfast forever. His kingdom is the one which will shall not be destroyed and his dominion shall endure to the end.

He delivers and rescues and he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth who

has preserved Daniel from the power of the lions. This again is a declaration of the kingdom of God after the one has risen after Daniel has risen as it were from the dead. As he's risen from the dead the declaration that all authority and power belongs to this God and that his name is proclaimed to all the nations.

It's a similar pattern as we see within the gospels which end with the great commission this in Matthew and Luke. We see this great commission or the statement of Christ's worldwide authority later on associated with the decree of Cyrus. And these stories then are ones that should be read alongside each other.

When Christ comes he's coming into a pattern of story that has existed before and people should not be entirely surprised to hear the parallels. Now can we draw a stronger connection than this? A stronger connection between the story of Daniel and the story of Christ? Can we draw it from the text of Daniel itself? I suggest that we can. As you look in the story that we find here what you'll see is it's the verse of the preceding chapter gives us a very important detail.

The very night Belshazzar king of the Chaldeans was that very night Belshazzar king of the Chaldeans was slain and Darius the Mede received the kingdom being about 62 years old. Now why mention the age of Darius at this point? We never hear elsewhere in scripture the ages of gentile kings given. Why would you give the age of Darius? It just seems like an odd thing to include.

And even more so because the age is not absolutely exact. It says or it seems very exact 62 years, but then it says about 62 years. Why say about 62 years when you could you're giving a fairly exact number there? I think if you look further on in the text you will find the answer.

And in chapter 9 we see at the beginning of chapter 9 So he begins to pray. But that's the beginning and sets the context of what happens. And while he prays and confesses his sin Gabriel who is seen in a vision previously comes to him at the time of the evening offering and talks to him.

And here is the explanation. So we've seen 62 as the age given for Darius when he receives the kingdom. And this prophecy is given in the first year of Darius's reign.

There's something about Darius coming to the throne that heralds something new. It's the beginning of the it's the end of the period. It's the end of the 70 years.

So the first year is the 70th year of exile. So you have 62 years that he's of age and then the 70th year is the first year of his reign. It's a significant number.

It's exactly the same thing as we see within this list here. So there are seven years then there's 62 years and then there's one year and the 70th year. Daniel is cast into the den of lions in the 70th year of that period of time in the middle of that period during the

reign of King Darius.

Darius has just set up his kingdom. He's just set up certain people in positions of authority. He's establishing his kingdom at the very earlier stage.

And this is the first year presumably of his reign and in the middle of that year Daniel is thrown into the den of lions. And what happens in the 70th year of or in the 70th week it's 70 weeks of years. What happens in the 70th week in the prophecy? After the 62 weeks Messiah shall be cut off.

So in the 70th week but not for himself and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city in the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood until the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week.

But in the middle of the week, he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. Christ descends into the den of lions in his 70th week. And so in the story of Daniel you're seeing in the context of the 70 years prophesied by Jeremiah in the 70th year of that Daniel is placed in the lion's den.

Now I mentioned earlier that Babylon is a lion's den. Babylon is associated with lions. The prophecy that we see concerning the four beasts, the beast that's associated with Babylon is a lion.

And we have other figures within the story that are associated with lions. Ariok. And we have the lion's den that symbolizes Babylon.

So Judah is cast into the lion's den and in the 70th week Daniel is pulled out of the lion's den. Now, how would Daniel understand this? In part, I believe that he would understand that there is something about this event that is not just about a great deliverance that God is doing in his personal life and as a result of his faithfulness. But God is bringing his people out of the lion's den.

That God is going to deliver the people because the 70 years are up. They have been preserved within the lion's den just as Jonah was preserved in the belly of the big fish. Now they are being brought up and there is this declaration of the kingdom of God.

This is a similar thing that we see in the declaration of Cyrus, the decree of Cyrus. So the pattern exists as a pattern of 70 years, 7 and 62, 62 the age of Darius when he comes to the throne and then the first year of Darius's reign, that's the 70th year. And then the prophecy of 70 weeks of years.

You have this one week of years and then you have 62 weeks and then after that the Messiah comes and is cut off. And that I believe helps us to see a very direct connection between Daniel in the lion's den and Christ in his death and resurrection. In this story,

we are seeing an anticipation of what happens in the events that we recall this weekend.

In the death and resurrection of Christ, we have a prefiguration. Well, we see those things prefigured in the story of Daniel. Look back at this story and there are more things that you can observe, but these connections are important.

They help us to see that when Christ comes, these are not just complete bolts from the blue, things that could never be anticipated. On one level they can't be anticipated, but when they do occur, they occur as things that are fitting, that are appropriate, that fit the patterns that have existed. You've read the story of Joseph put down in the pit and then raised up to the right hand of the king.

One with two criminals alongside him, one raised up and another brought down. You've read the story of Jonah in the belly of the big fish, three days and three nights. You've read the story of Daniel who faithfully went into the realm of his enemies who were conspiring against him, who rejected him and who used the ruler to bring him down and bearing false testimony against him.

He faithfully prays in an upper room, but then he's placed in the den of lions. You've read all these stories. You've read about the Psalms when David talks about his experience with King Saul and he speaks about it as an experience with lions.

You've read Psalm 22 where the lion who tries to, the snarling lion, along with the bulls of Bashan, and this is seen as a messianic Psalm. In all of these places, you've seen this prefigured. You've seen this story and then when it happens, you have that moment of recognition.

This is what we heard about. This is what we were anticipating. But we didn't know what it was and now it has happened.

It all clicks into place. This is the epiphany that Christ, I believe, gave his disciples on the road to Emmaus and later on when he opened their eyes to understand the scriptures. All those things that were told concerning him.

All of these stories that ultimately find their goal in him. These connected stories. Stories that seem by themselves very much odd, but when you read them together, you start to see patterns emerging and as those patterns emerge, you see that that pattern is one that reveals the face of Christ.

Thank you very much for listening. God bless you this Good Friday. If you have any questions, please leave them in my Curious Cat account.

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