

# Daniel 2.1-23

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*Don't panic!*

Amington (Online)

Sunday 24 January 2021

Daniel: Faithful in Exile [2]

## **A blind panic**

Have you ever been in a real blind panic?

Once when Jess and I woke up, she checked her phone and saw some messages from Santander, telling her that her card had been declined three times in Tesco, while we were both fast asleep.

She said, 'Oh no, my purse was in the car' – we thought her car had been nicked. Instantly I was wide awake, leapt out of bed, ran downstairs – to find the front door wide open. Cue panic...

I ran into the kitchen – all the cupboards and drawers were open, my wallet and Jess's keys were gone. We had been burgled, although they kindly left Jess's car keys on the front seat when they left to try and use her cards in Tesco!

Thankfully nothing much else was taken.

## Panic (1-13)

*Show video of Cpl Jones 'Don't panic!'*

My example of panic was relatively trivial – it could have been a lot worse. Some of you may know real panic, real fear. In our reading, the king's advisers panicked and were afraid because their lives were in very real danger.

But they weren't the only ones who were afraid. Did you spot who else was afraid?

[King] Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep... he said, 'I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means.'

*Daniel 2.1 & 3 (NIV)*

Nebuchadnezzar couldn't sleep. A guilty conscience perhaps? He was worried, anxious, troubled by his dreams. He was a bully, and actually bullies are easily scared by things out of their control, by things they can't bully into submission.

And then he makes his ludicrous demand:

The king [said] to the astrologers, ‘This is what I have firmly decided: if you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble... So tell me the dream and interpret it for me.’

*Daniel 2.5-6 (NIV)*

The threat wasn’t only to kill his advisors, but their families too. If you think Nebuchadnezzar would let those families leave the houses before reducing them to rubble, you haven’t quite got the measure of him yet. He was arrogant, powerful, and brutal.

His advisors begged him to share his dream so they could interpret it for him (7), but he was tired and mean and cranky and wanted to flex his royal muscles.

This was a test for Babylonian religion – and it failed. The words ‘tell’ and ‘show’ and ‘make known’ and ‘reveal’ come thick and fast in these verses... but the best in Babylon couldn’t do it!

The point is this: pagan religion is useless and helpless; it can't see and it doesn't know. **'What the king asks is too difficult,'** they said (11) – and they were right! Their religion was *shown up* and revealed to be nothing more than human stuff, and no-one can tell what another person dreamt!

The **magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers** (2) had nothing to fall back on, nothing but themselves. They couldn't meet Nebuchadnezzar's challenge, and **this made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon** (12). Notice the two words: Nebuchadnezzar was **angry and furious**. We might say he was incandescent with rage.

And, did you notice **that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon** – even the ones that weren't there, like **Daniel and his friends** (13). That's the sort of man Nebuchadnezzar was.

It was a pretty sticky situation. But in the middle of this uproar, one man stood up and said, 'Don't panic' – and unlike Corporal Jones, he actually meant it.

## Don't panic (14-19a)

Two nuns were driving through Transylvania when suddenly, out of nowhere, a vampire jumped on their windscreen! The nuns panicked and the one who was driving started to swerve the car back and forth to try and shake him off – but to no avail.

Really panicking now, she shouted to the other nun, 'Quick, quick, show him your cross, show him your cross!'

The other one leant forward, banged on the windscreen and yelled angrily, 'Get off the windscreen you horrible vampire!'

Are you in a panic-worthy situation? To be honest at the moment I'm more weary than full of panic. In a sense the pandemic is masking the problems we already had – but they are still there. Are you in a panic-worthy situation?

Most of us are blessed not to be facing a situation as serious as Daniel was. **Arioch, the commander of the king's guard** – the top soldier in Babylon, and you didn't get *that* job by being nice and friendly – arrived at Daniel's house to put him **to death** (14). I can't even imagine what I would do if the authorities knocked on our door to take me away to put me to death. Many Christians face this situation all over the world today – mercifully we do not.

Let's see what Daniel did – because I think the way he reacted to this situation can help us when we feel the panic rising.

**First**, Daniel *worked out what was going on*: **he asked the king's officer, 'Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?'** (15). Instead of despairing, Daniel asked the king's executioner what was going on, and **Arioch then explained the matter**.

This is important, because sometimes – let's be honest – we get into a flap for no reason, or for the wrong reason. Then we respond to the wrong situation in the wrong way – or maybe make the whole thing even worse! We need to work out what is going on.

**Second**, Daniel *put his trust in God*. I can't quite believe what Daniel did next: **he went in to the king** (16)! The king who had just ordered Daniel's execution, full of anger and fury (12) – that king, Daniel went to see. He **asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him** (16).

When Daniel did that he *really* put his trust in God. *He* couldn't tell the king what his dream was, any more than the pagan wise men could (see 2.27-28) – as they said, **"There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks!"** (10) – which is why Daniel chose to put his trust in the **God of heaven** (18).

**Third**, Daniel *involved his friends*. **Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah** (17) – remember their Babylonian names were Hadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel didn't face the situation alone; he didn't have to.

Friends, *we* don't have to face *this* or *any* situation by ourselves. It's tempting to hunker down, to retreat into ourselves, to face our troubles alone, so we 'don't bother' anyone else. There's a strange sort of pride in that attitude: not wanting to ask for help, not wanting to admit we're finding things difficult.

Daniel was humble enough to involve his friends – are you?

Fourth, Daniel *prayed to God*. Daniel **urged [his friends] to plead [to God] for mercy** that **they might not be executed** (18).

We know Daniel prayed faithfully every day, even when he wasn't in danger, but here the imminent risk of death no doubt helped them to pray and *plead* with God all through the night! They prayed all night – not only for themselves, but for all **the** (pagan) **wise men of Babylon** too (18).

*(When Daniel spoke to the king about the dream, he deliberately saved all of them, not only himself and his friends – see v24.)*

Daniel didn't panic but acted with calm wisdom; Daniel didn't panic, but put his trust in God – and **during the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision** (19). God came through!

Now I don't know about you, but I'd like to die like my Grandad did, peacefully in my sleep; and definitely not in a blind panic like the 245 passengers in the aeroplane he was piloting at the time.

The old ones are the best...

## **Praise (19b-23)**

The narrative continues nicely in verse 24, which we'll get to next week – but before that we have four whole verses of praise. In the previous four verses, Daniel spoke to the king's guard (15), visited the king (16), returned home, spoke to his friends, told them what was going on (17), and spent the night in prayer (18).

The events are compressed, but Daniel's prayer of praise is not. How tempting it is to move on to the next item on the list when we get what we want, when we hear from God, when we finish the thing we're doing!

But not Daniel: he stops, and praises God. The pagan wise men were right: **‘There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks!’** they cried (10). So Daniel prayed to **the God of heaven** (18) – and gave him *all* the credit and *all* the glory.

[Daniel] said,

‘Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;  
wisdom and power are his.

He changes times and seasons;  
he deposes kings and raises up others.

He gives wisdom to the wise  
and knowledge to the discerning.

He reveals deep and hidden things;  
he knows what lies in darkness,  
and light dwells with him.

I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors:  
you have given me wisdom and power,  
you have made known to me what we asked of you,  
you have made known to us the dream of the king.’

*Daniel 2.20-23 (NIV)*

Daniel is given insight as a gift, and quite rightly the first thing he does is turn and praise the giver of that gift.

And don't forget – Daniel's life was still in danger! He praised God *before* he went to Nebuchadnezzar with the dream and its interpretation. He praised God *while he was still in mortal danger*.

## **Don't panic**

As we close, let's recap on the steps Daniel took to avoid losing his head – literally:

1. Daniel worked out what was going on
2. Daniel put his trust in God
3. Daniel involved his friends
4. Daniel prayed to God
5. Daniel praised God

They're pretty simple, but hard to do, because our natural instincts fight against them. Jumping to conclusions, falling into despair, facing things alone, forgetting and ignoring God – those are the *easy* ways of responding to panic.

But Daniel's is the *wise* way.

Whatever we, whatever you are facing today, let us face them not with panic but like Daniel: with wisdom resulting in God's praise.