

## **"Christians the Representatives of Christ"**

by  
**William H. Odenheimer**

***"And the king spake and said to Daniel,  
O Daniel, servant of the living God,  
is thy God, whom thou servest continually,  
able to deliver thee from the lions? "***

**Daniel 6:20**

You have all remarked and been instructed by the firmness of Daniel in continuing his prayers three times a day in spite of his enemies; his unimpeachable integrity in his public and civil, as well as in his religious duties; the affectionate friendship between the Hebrew stranger and his imperial master Darius; his wonderful deliverance from the den of lions and his final triumph. But has it ever occurred to you, in studying this history, to dwell upon the momentous import of the question contained in the text with which the king, in all sincerity and earnestness, approached the lions' den after Daniel had passed the night there?

Is any one ready to inquire, "What is there in the question beyond an exhibition of Darius' real love for Daniel and his deep anxiety to ascertain the safety of his favorite minister? I think that there is far more than that involved in this question. That long night which Darius had passed in fasting--and which presented the unwonted spectacle of an oriental monarch's court suddenly stripped of its brilliant pomp and luxury, and his palace turned into a house of mourning--was a night of deep reflection, not on the mere personal issue involved in the life or death of Daniel but on the higher and eternal issue of the truth or falsehood of Daniel's God. While angelic messengers were beside the prophet in the den restraining the fury of the ravenous beasts, satanic messengers exulting in their fancied victory were busy with the heart of the Persian king, suggesting that now he should test the power of Bel, his idol god, and the vaunted power of Jehovah. Think for a moment how certain Satan's emissaries must have been when the servant of the living God was actually cast into the den of lions and the seal secured the mouth. What could save him? As in after days when the Son of Man lay dead within the sealed sepulchre, so now God and Satan were confronted, as it were; and in the eyes of men, a direct issue joined as to their relative power.

Look at the question of the king as contained in the text. He does not say, "O Daniel, loyal and faithful friend and ruler, art thou still alive?" No, he seems, with all his love for Daniel, to have merged the subject of Daniel's personal safety in the deeper, more momentous, more startling question of the ABILITY of Daniel's God. His words are, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is THY GOD, whom thou servest continually, ABLE to deliver thee from the lions?" He is thinking of Daniel not as his friend, but as God's representative and exponent [advocate]. He is inquiring not only as to Daniel's safety but as to the power of the living God! His mind has been full of the question, "Which is true, his religion or Daniel's? Which is true, his God or Daniel's?"

He has put the issue of this question upon Daniel's preservation, and he has done it not in an impatient and unworthy spirit but after a night of fasting, weeping, and praying. Satan, thinking himself secure, has contributed his share to bring about in the heart of the king

(that great representative of heathendom) this issue between true and false religion; and God's Spirit has done His share in suggesting the very same issue. The magnanimous heart of Darius was the battleground whereon was fought one of those decisive conflicts which, from the beginning of man's probation to this hour, decide for a nation and an age the supremacy of truth over error, the essential power of the one ever-living God, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.

Just think for one moment what would have been the result had the king's call met with no response. Do not believe that the only result would have been grief for a friend's death, soon to be forgotten in the splendors and responsibilities of the imperial government. As the lamentable tones of his full-hearted cry rang through the den--"O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?"--had the lips of Daniel's maimed body been sealed in death, response would have been given to the king in the lions' roar--"The God of Daniel is not able; He is not the living God." And from that hour Darius would have been confirmed in his heathenism, and a darker night of error would have settled down on him and his multitudinous kingdom. The issue which Darius made when he cried, "Is thy God able?" was not from impatience nor through vain curiosity. It was an issue in which not only he and his people, but all beings in Heaven, in earth, and under the earth, were interested. And the cry of the king, lamentable as it was in its audible tones, was in truth the fierce battle-cry of heathendom as it rushed on to its discomfiture.

Daniel was made, all unconsciously on his part, the representative of God. Darius and his nobles, his nation and that age, held Daniel as the visible exponent [advocate] of the power of Him whom he served continually. They felt that they had a right to decide upon the character of Jehovah in the person of His professed and inflexible worshipper. They had not access to written attestations of God's power in past ages; they were no students of Scripture. They were men of war, or philosophers after their kind, observers of natural signs and open to appeals--miraculous or otherwise--to their senses. And therefore God was ready to give to Darius and all whom he represented the sign of power, which by the miraculous preservation of Daniel they justly asked.

The king's cry was instantly answered. Daniel unhurt, replied, "O king, live forever! My God has shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me." And there went forth--as the imperishable memorial of the glorious *moral* triumph for God and truth, which I think this history ought to teach--that decree addressed to all people, nations, and languages that dwell in the earth: "That in every dominion men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for He is the living God, and steadfast forever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end."

Having by this analysis suggested to your minds, and in some degree (I hope) proved the strictly moral and spiritual lesson which this history teaches, let me offer it to you as a great and practical lesson wholesome for our day, most worthy to be studied and practised by every one of us. If Daniel was held by Darius and the men of his day as the representative and exponent of the power and character of Jehovah, it is equally true--both upon principles of sound reason and by the direct statement of the Word of God--that Christians, in their corporate and in their individual capacity, are the representatives of the Christian's God, and are held by the world around as a sign of the power and character of Jesus Christ our Lord and God.

Let us contemplate, first, the servants of Christ in their great corporate capacity. I affirm that the Christendom of this age is justly held by the heathendom of this age as a witness to the power and true nature of the God of Christendom. If any one who knows the history of states and governments ruled by professedly Christian men shall shrink [recoil] from this assertion, if he [should] say the wars, the wrongs, the vices, the extortions of civilized Christian nations equal and even exceed at times those of the heathen so that the God of Christians (if we argue from His servants' actions as to His nature and power) is as feeble as idols to restrain and purify the passions of our humanity, [then] I answer (whether you shrink [recoil] or not), [that] the heathen will not fail to pass judgment after this rule. And they have judged, to the disgrace of ourselves and to the hindrance of Christian missions, that our God is not able to deliver us from the dishonesty and sins which oppress themselves. O that Christians in their corporate character would only realize how the world is daily making the issue which Darius made between truth and error; and as it marks the sins of the Church or of Christian nations, is asking in mockery, "Is thy God whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?"

When one looks at the history of our own Christian nation in its dealings with the Indians, when one considers the dealings of Christian Spain toward the ancient people of Mexico or of England in the opium trade with China, can we wonder that the nature of the God whom we profess to serve is judged of by heathens and unbelievers according to the moral character of Christians themselves? Can we wonder that they think Him cruel and weak when they see exhibited such signs of rapacity combined with feeble morals?

O Christian people! Whether we believe it or not [and] whether or not we admit the justice of the rule, the world, the heathen, the infidel of all sorts are deciding the great question between truth and error in our actions. The cry of heathendom (oh, how lamentable often in its tones of disappointment!) has gone up, it ought to be heard by us, saying, "Servants of the living God, is your God, whom you serve continually, able to deliver you from the lions?" Is He able to save you from those sins, and vices, and influences of evil which our gods have not been able to do for us? Is your God whom you serve able to deliver you from the power of lust, and licentiousness, and intemperance, and love of money? Is thy God able to deliver thee from the lions?"

But let us turn for a moment to consider our subject in its application to us Christians in our more personal relations. As the individual follower of Jesus, it is the duty of each one to receive and ponder well the truth that each Christian disciple is held to be the representative of the power and nature of Him whom he serves. In all this discourse I have said nothing of the other truth, which is the correlative of that which we are now considering, viz., that we must judge of a system by its own merits and not by the action of its nominal professors. That truth I do not forget. But it is equally a truth [1] that each Christian ought to be a representative of Christ in this world; [2] that so has Christ Himself appointed [it to be so]; and [3] that, justly or not, the world and unbelievers do so regard the Christian disciple. If they should judge that Christ has not power to help His disciples because the disciples of Christ do not manifest spiritual power over themselves, it may be perfectly true that the real solution is to be found in the heartless, formal, or hypocritical character of that Christian. But--and this is the point--the world will set it down to the inability of Christ and His faith.

Christians are, in the eye of the world, the exponents [advocates] of Christ, the representatives of His faith and Gospel. The issue between the power of Christ and that of the god of this world is constantly going forth--"O servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, *able* to deliver thee?" Can Christ, can the Gospel, can the religion which you profess and to which you seem to cling, can He or it deliver you from those lions which ravage the heart and moral character of men of the world? Can thy God deliver thee, O Christian, from impurity, from covetousness, from selfishness? Can Christ give thee power to be truthful in the midst of falsehood, honest in the midst of fraud, temperate in the midst of indulgence, pure in the midst of the most seductive vice? Is *thy* God able to make thee use power with discretion, bear reverses with fortitude, meet death with resignation?

Oh brother in Christ! You may shrink from being thus made to answer for Christ. You may point away from yourself to the holy books which record the words and principles of the Master, the Founder of the faith. But the world will not let you so divert *their* eyes, nor obscure the point of their stern interrogatory [question]. The question is not whether the Bible be a better, more truthful and holy book than the Koran of Mahomet or the book of Mormon. But [the question is], are you--the lover of that Book, the servant of its Author, the defender of its faith, the commender of its authority as the sole rule of faith and practice--are you a better man than the Mahometan or the man who makes no pretension to serve Christ and to invoke the Spirit of the living God?

This is the question; and the unbeliever will hold each Christian to its answer. And for one, though it humbles me to say so, I trust that each Christian will be so held by the world; so held to its answer that we shall confess publicly that we are consciously inconsistent; and, roused to a deeper sense of our responsibility, determine to claim and use the grace offered so as to be indeed Christ's representatives in the world--the light and the salt of this dark and corrupting mass of a fallen humanity.

The appeal--"Servant of the living God, is thy God ABLE?"--ought to be answered. We should each one be able to say, "I have by the grace of God, by Christ in me and not of myself, a power which the servants of sin and the devil have not. Jesus by His Spirit is able to deliver me from the lion. He has delivered me; and will still, if I am faithful--will deliver me from those sins which, without His help, will devour like a lion and tear in pieces the moral nature of men."

Brothers in Christ, if our daily life does not make the just response to the world's demand--that we show the power of our God--what a fearful responsibility rests upon us! Should we not at once confess our sins, humble ourselves before our injured Saviour, and seek for pardon and new grace? Oh, when the world says, "It is a Christian man who defrauds, it is a Christian man who yields to temptations to dishonesty or vice or crime"; when it mocks us and says, "Servants of God, your God is not able to deliver you"; [then] let us humble ourselves. Let us feel a brother's sin as [one] shared in by us. For all our lukewarmness, and sin, and inconsistency (whether known or not) do, in their degree, wrong Christ and hinder the glorious purposes of His kingdom.

Let us, then, bear about with us the daily recollection that the warfare between Christ and Satan is waged in our own persons, and that our inconsistency decides for the world against Christ. Let us know that we have much to do toward encouraging those who ask in a truly

lamentable voice, sick of the world's impotency and hoping that we can answer them with satisfaction, "O servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" A consistent holy course may win, through Jesus' merits, souls to Christ and honor to the living God, whom we serve continually.

Chapter XII, "Christians Representatives of Christ," in William H. Odenheimer, *Sermons* (New York, E. P. Dutton and Co., 1881). **Note:** The text has not been modified, except that punctuation has been modernized and long paragraphs have been divided.